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Morley Beeches;

OR,

Girlish Charms and Golden Dowers.

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AUTHOR OF "LITTLE CLAIRE, THE OPERA-SINGER," "BERYL WARD," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

NASTURTIUM BLOSSOMS.

For the flower of life is red.

BROWNING'S "GOLD HAIR."

ORIOLE DARIEN had plenty to think of as she strolled along the grass-grown garden paths in the July sunlight, more aimless than the blue-and-yellow butterflies flickering about her. Her father, Zophiel Darien, steward of Morley Beeches, had that morning received a letter

from its young master, announcing his return from abroad, after an absence of four years, and his intended speedy home-coming. This news was very exciting to the young girl, who had been a hoyden of twelve when the heir went away, and was now between sixteen and seventeen. She had lived in the pretty vine-covered Lodge by the gate all these years almost without other companionship than her father's, who worshiped his little girl, though his stern manners allowed little show of his feeling. The Lodge had several rooms; and the steward, whose salary was liberal, kept a kitchen-maid, and had a charming little parlor, with a piano, for his daughter. Too proud to permit the association with common people, yet too humble to win the attention of the rich "gentry" of the neighborhood, he had made the mistake of allowing the girl to come up without society. She was very fond of him, and she did not miss what she had never enjoyed.

However, this sunny afternoon, she was in a

state of anticipation so eager that she could not explain it to herself. The great house would be open—there would be fine company!—she looked forward with burning impatience to the great event. She longed to see Morley Beeches alive with beautiful ladies and courtly gentlemen—to catch glimpses of rich toilets, to hear snatches of sweet music, to inhale the odors of sumptuous dinners, to hear carriages rolling along the fine avenues! Her heart beat fast with these delightful images.

The garden through which Oriole wandered was large, wild and neglected. There were masses of self-sown asters; gorgeous poppies, sweet-williams, larkspurs, white and tiger-lilies, sweet alyssum, mignonette; her dress caught on the thorns of untrimmed rose-bushes; the arbor was roofed and matted with honeysuckle; the marble basin of the fountain was green with moss—suddenly she stooped to where some nasturtiums were climbing over a bed of clove



"IS THIS A SPRITE HAUNTING MY DESERTED HOUSE, OR A CREATURE OF FLESH AND BLOOD WHO HONORS MY POOR GARDEN?"

twined them in her black hair, with instinctive knowledge that the burning orange and red of the flowers would become her. They lighted up her vivid Gipsy beauty as by magic, bringing out the purple tints in her dusky locks, the glory of her great dark eyes, the rich veining of her olive cheeks—for this young creature, ignorant of herself, had a dower of personal charms greater than any lady in the land. Her black brows might be a shade too heavy, but they gave character to a face full of expression, while the curves of the scarlet mouth redeemed them by their delicious softness. Her complexion was very dark but smooth and rich as velvet; her figure slim and supple. Crimson roses, blazing tiger-lilies, burning nasturtiums, whatever was brilliant and blooming in that old garden might claim sisterhood with Oriole Darien.

A young man, who—not being able to enter by the locked gates—had clambered over a broken place in the wall and sauntered leisurely through the grounds, chanced upon the neglected garden, just as Oriole twined the flowers in her black hair.

"Mystery of mysteries! Who is this?" thought the owner of Morley Beeches, who, if ever cognizant of the fact, had entirely forgotten that his steward had a daughter—a little girl when he went away—and who, if he had remembered it, would hardly have associated a thought of her with this blooming, exquisite young lady.

Doffing his hat he stepped forward with a low bow.

"Is this a charming sprite haunting my deserted house, or a veritable creature of flesh and blood who honors my poor garden?"

Oriole, whirling about, stared a moment in mute astonishment; then an eager smile lit up her lovely face, and she cried joyfully:

"Is it Mr. Eugene Morley? Oh, I am so glad you are coming back! It is so lonesome here without any one. I am neither a sprite nor a young lady, sir—only little Oriole Darien."

"Only little Oriole," repeated the young gentleman, coming closer to her and holding out his hand with a sudden change of expression and a flattering smile. "I left a little Gipsy elf, and find in her place—an angel! You kissed me when I went away, Oriole—will you kiss me now?"

She lifted her face as innocently as the child of twelve had done; his sparkling, dark-gray eyes ran over the lovely curves of the rounded oval cheeks, the delicious lips, the smooth neck, before he kissed her—there was something in the ardor of his salute which made her blush, she knew not why.

"So you are really glad to see me?" still holding her hand and smiling down at her with a kind of wonder.

"Yes, I am delighted. I have dreamed, over and over, how it would be when the great house was full of company and there were dinners or balls every week! I shall enjoy seeing the ladies in their splendid toilets, the gentlemen riding off to the hunt—lights at the windows of nights, carriages coming and going. I am wild with anticipation! But, how came you here to-day, and alone?"

"I thought it would only be prudent to pay a flying visit in advance to ascertain the condition of the place before bringing my friends here; so I left my party at the Clarendon and came out to take an observation. Where shall I find your father?"

"He has gone to the village for supplies, and a letter of instructions from you which he expects; you will have to wait an hour or two, I am afraid, Mr. Morley."

"Then I shall not be able to return to the city this afternoon," remarked the young gentleman, resignedly. "I dare say your father will give me some supper; and I can sleep in my own house."

"I should think so," was the laughing answer. "I suppose the housekeeper and butler, with a whole retinue of servants, will be out, to-morrow!"

"Yes," he replied, smiling into the excited, glowing eyes, "Crabb, the butler, and Mrs. Dapple, the housekeeper, with all the necessary underlings, will make a raid on Morley Beeches in the morning. I shall keep my friends in town for three or four days until my cook has time to fill up his pantries. Where did you get these yellow flowers? Who taught you what colors are becoming to you?"

"I found the nasturtiums over there; I have never been taught anything much, I expect, with a passing shadow on the radiant face. "Would you like to walk about the garden, sir?—you can scarcely imagine what a tangle it has grown during more than four years of neglect. But, I love it, all the same."

"I shall be glad to see it—if you will show it to me, Oriole."

Zophiel Darien was detained in the village until deep dusk; yet the returning master of Morley Beeches forgot that he had come to learn the condition of the house; the garden had a fascination for him, it would seem. He had roamed over the world for years only to find at home something more exquisitely beautiful than he had seen in all his journeyings. The admiring glances he stole at the artless *cicerone* of the flowers were filled with increasing surprise and pleasure; he could scarcely credit the reality of this unexpected adventure of an afternoon. She took him to the weed-choked fountains, the dark pool of water under the pines beyond the fernery, the mossy statue of Psyche, and finally to the honeysuckle arbor, where he complained of being tired and asked her to sit and rest.

"Won't your gardener be discouraged at the look of things?" asked Oriole, merrily, looking out on the tangled thickets of bloom.

"It will give him something to do."

"Are you going to bring a large party to Morley Beeches?" she continued, with keen interest.

"A dozen people, more or less," he answered, smiling at the eager curiosity flashing in those great eyes, and studying the effect of a single gold beam of the declining sunlight streaming through the lattice against the red cheek and dusky hair.

"Do you think you will give a fancy-dress ball?" clasping the little brown hands.

"If you will come to it, Oriole, I will," he half-whispered.

Eugene Morley did not mean to be a bad man. If any one had told him then, that evening, that he was acting like a heartless scoundrel, he would have been honestly indignant, yet it was true—for he was an engaged man, who had chosen a patrician bride; yet he was doing his very best to fascinate the innocent child by his side. The only thing to be said in his defense is that the wonder and glory of her strange tropical beauty had dazzled him and blinded him to consequences, for the time being. What his *afterthought* would be remained to be proved. He was infatuated with this fresh type of girlhood; he could not, or would not, think of her peril and let her alone.

The two hours in that dreamy old garden which the young master of Morley Beeches spent with Oriole made the crisis of her fate. She gave him her heart—gave it to him as Eve gave hers to Adam, without a question, without a thought that it could be otherwise. No dictates of prudence troubled her—no scruples of propriety—no dread of their inequality. She just simply fell in love with him.

He knew, while he lingered, whispering his gallant flatteries, and kissed her again, on the plea of childish friendship—

"With lips that left their meaning in her blood—"

that there was danger to her of this; but the temptation, he said to himself, was irresistible; and with a man's selfishness he yielded to it.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLACK RIDDLE.

For a raven ever croaks at my side,
"Keep watch and ward, keep watch and ward,
Or thou wilt prove their tool."

—TENNYSON.

ANOTHER stranger arrived at Morley Beeches on the following day, after its young master had returned to the city to stay with his party at the Brunswick until the house should be in order; and while Crabb, the butler, and Mrs. Dapple, the housekeeper, with all their train, had seized upon the goodly mansion to get it ready for occupation.

This visitor was also a young man, about the same age as Eugene Morley, and he, too, had walked from the railroad station in the village three miles away. He came slowly up the magnificent beech avenue, carrying his own traveling-bag, and looking earnestly about him as if recalling familiar memories of the old place—admiring the approach as well as the house itself, spacious, picturesque, with a square brick tower, roomy wings, a flagged pavement in front edged with neglected roses and leading to a broad flight of stone steps; wide, pillared piazzas, casemented and oriole windows, clasped about with ivy and honeysuckle.

Twenty-five years ago this had been altogether the finest structure in that part of the country; now there were modern villas, set in fanciful grounds, on every side, yet Morley Beeches held its own for steadfast stateliness and surroundings of manorial extent.

The young traveler came leisurely onward

until he reached the great front door where Crabb chanced to be giving orders to some one of his underlings. The supercilious eye of the butler ran over the person who had arrived on foot, carrying his bag, and whose clothes were dusty and of ordinary cut; but Crabb had waited on good company, and it was his boast that he knew a gentleman when he saw one—there was something in the bearing of the one before him which caused him to assume a respectful air.

"I should infer that Mr. Morley had not arrived?" said the stranger, glancing at the *debris* of unpacking in the hall. "I am his brother, and had a letter from him a fortnight ago inviting me to join him at Morley Beeches. It named to-day for my arrival."

"Ah, yes, sir, just so, sir! You are Mr. Felix Gathorne," and Crabb smiled graciously. "Mr. Morley told me if you came, sir, to make his apologies, and he was very sorry, but the steamer did not arrive as soon as expected, which put us back a day or two. He will be here day after to-morrow, Mr. Gathorne; meanwhile we are to make you as comfortable as circumstances allows. I'll speak to Mrs. Dapple at once about getting a room ready, sir."

"Do not hurry her. I can spend the day very pleasantly in wandering over the place. I had a biscuit and a glass of ale at the village; a simple meal will answer my wants in the way of dinner, this evening. If you will dispose of my bag, I will amuse myself going over the house and grounds. This is my first visit to Morley Beeches in several years."

"A fine old place it is, sir; quite hequal to the hold country; but in sad need of being done over. Well, I was to be particular to say to make yourself at home, Mr. Gathorne."

"Thanks; I shall do so," and turning from the respectful servant, the visitor walked to the end of the long piazza and sat down on the coping of the carved stone balustrade which closed it in.

"If I had my rights I should make myself at home with a vengeance," he muttered, looking gloomily out at the grand old trees, the neglected shrubberies, the long grass of the lawn, all steeped in the liquid gold of a summer mid-day. "This place is mine—if I could only prove it! 'Ay, there's the rub!' I have brooded over it until my whole youth lies in the shadow of that brooding. I studied law, that I might be better fitted to cope with the legal difficulties which might arise. And now, the time is ripe for me to put forth some culminating effort. What will the fruit be? Either victory or death, for I will not drag on this humble life of poverty—and longing; it will kill as surely as chains and a dungeon!" and the pallor that came to his face showed the intensity of his feeling and purpose.

"What a strange creature is that old colored woman I went to see, yesterday! I must pay her another visit; yet there is very little hope of getting information from old Diana. She is very old, now, stone-blind—has been called insane since that dreadful night. Dreadful night, indeed, for the lightning struck the wing of Gathorne Towers, set it on fire and consumed my poor dead mother's body! Nurse Diana was there—my dear mother's faithful servant and friend. She it was who saved the lives of two children at the peril of her own. It was thought that she, too, had perished in the flames, until she was found wandering in the woods, terribly burned, with a broken ankle, and mad as a March hare. It is the firm belief of all my friends that Diana had possession of and concealed—at my mother's request—her last and legal will; but where? Continually she mutters to herself what her people call, the Black Riddle. She crooned it over to me yesterday. It seems simple enough; yet no one has ever found the spot indicated:

"Three times one hundred and three
From the tower-bell to the red rose tree;
Diana's riddle is riddled there—
She that is dead will name the heir."

"From the tower-bell to the red-rose tree," repeated Felix, swinging himself over the balustrade to the pavement below, and standing off in the thick tall grass of the lawn until he had a good view of the square brick tower at the right-hand corner of the old house.

Mrs. Dapple came to Crabb before the long afternoon was half over to confide her suspicions as to the sanity of the master's brother; for that young gentleman had been up in the bell-tower twenty times if he had once, coming down at a measured pace, counting his steps, and going onward out of doors a certain distance in every direction. To her surprise her fellow-worker burst into a laugh.

"I don't see nothink to split your sides about," she remarked, with offended dignity.

"It's the hidea of it, Mrs. Dapple! Bless your soul, I knows what he's about. I bean't an old family servant, I acknowledge, that might know all the secrets of the 'ouse, but I've 'eard of the Black Riddle, for all that! I've 'eard my young master say it over to the ladies an' gentlemen at dinner, many a time, till I could say it quite by 'eart if I hadn't 'a' forgotten it. It's somethink about 'three hundred and three'—steps, most people think it means—though many says feet, and some says rods—an' you'll come to the buried will of master's father's second wife. That half-brother of Mr. Morley's is a-trying of it on, like many another before him. They do say—in a whisper—if the will was found, he would be the true an' lawful owner of everythink. But, it's my hopinion there'll never be another master in young Mr. Morley's place till he is dead an' gone; an' I hope there mayn't; for a better, freer master we don't need to crave for, Mrs. Dapple."

Oriole Darien came out of the great drawing-room, where she had been busy much of the day, just in time to hear the butler's eulogium of his master, and she gave him a lustrous smile as she went by.

"My heyes! what a high-stepping beauty!" he remarked, when she had passed on out-of-doors.

"Yes, far too pretty for a steward's daughter, Mr. Crabb. There won't no good come of her beauty, I'm afraid, with so many flighty young gentlemen about the place. If I was her father I'd send her away to school; he's able, an' such as she oughtn't to be here with no mother to look after her."

"Don't you believe but what Zophiel Darien will look close after her. That man is as proud as a duke. They do say his father was king of the Gipsies. An' he's got a temper as'll kill somebody some day, mark my words! It'll be dangerous business flirting with his daughter."

"I hope Mr. Morley hisself won't undertake it, then. He's that gay and thoughtless; though he ought to sober down now he's engaged to be married this fall—"

But here Felix Gathorne again approached, moving his lips at every measured step, and passing them with the abstracted air of a sleep-walker.

"What folly this is!" muttered Felix to himself, as his twentieth trial brought him to the statue of Psyche in the wilderness of flower-garden. "Eugene would resent it if I went digging over his grounds in hopes of finding that which would put me in his place; very properly, too! This doubt, this suspense is the curse of my life! But for it, I might settle down to my profession and work hard to make something of myself. As it is, the haunting phantom of my mother—my poor young mother, so beautiful and so deeply wronged—is ever urging me to seek my rights. I try not to envy Eugene; I try to be contented with playing the part of 'poor relation,' but, by Heaven, it is not in the Gathorne blood to do it! To be tricked out of what is mine by inheritance—to have another name in place of my own—to know Gathorne Towers changed to Morley Beeches—to receive favors from the one who should be the dependent—these are things bitter as death itself!"

He leaned against the pedestal of the statue, lost in discontented musings. It was falling toward sunset. The features of the marble Psyche gleaming near him were not more beautiful than his own. His pale, clear complexion, fiery, dark eyes, haughty, refined features and melancholy expression made him a man to excite admiring interest.

"Eugene writes me that he is engaged to a Miss St. Mark. He quite raves over her style, her beauty, her lineage. As for me, I have never yet met the woman I could love. Fortunate for me, since I need not hope to marry!"

And so thinking he raised his brooding eyes to behold before him, Oriole Darien.

She had come into the garden for a basket of flowers and stood near him, cutting lilies for a bouquet, not having observed him he had remained so utterly still. She wore a white frock that day; her broad garden-hat shaded a face of as vivid flower-like beauty as ever bloomed in this world—a wonderful face of the most splendid type of *bruna* loveliness—deliciously rich in coloring, maddeningly sweet in the curves of brow, cheek and chin. Felix caught his breath like a drowning man, while he did not stir so much as a finger. She severed the regal flowers from their stalks, all unconscious of the glowing surprise in a pair of eyes so near her.

"I have never yet met the woman I could love."

The thought was not gone from the young

man's mind before he had met her!—before he was irrevocably in love with her.

A feeling had sprung to life in his breast as different from Eugene's idle admiration as the soundless sea is deeper than the froth which sparkles on its crested wave!

The steward's daughter had made her conquest before she glanced up, starting to meet so fixed and fiery a gaze.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered, blushing—which was a rare thing for him to do.

"Are you Mr. Morley's brother?" she asked, without embarrassment. "Mrs. Dapple wished me to cut some flowers for your room."

"Yes, I am Felix Gathorne. And you?"

"Oh, I am only Oriole Darien," she answered, carelessly.

"A strange, sweet, tropical name! A strange, sweet, tropical creature! I did not dream there was a living thing so beautiful! And the flowers are for my room!" murmured Felix, under his breath.

Just then a lad in buttons came to summon Mr. Gathorne to the tea-dinner the housekeeper had ordered prepared for the guest.

"Shall I see you again? Are you a visitor at Morley Beeches?" he asked, before obeying the untimely summons.

"I dare say you will see me often enough," answered the girl, scarcely glancing up from the lilies. "I am only the steward's daughter," and she smiled with bright indifference.

"Not above me, then, poor as I am," thought Felix, forgetting, for a moment, that Gathorne pride that was so unbending.

He went away reluctantly to his solitary meal. Oriole passed on, singing softly to herself, cutting tall green ferns and tall white lilies, till her little brown hands were full, thinking that Mr. Felix Gathorne was a handsome gentleman, but nothing to be compared to the master of Morley Beeches. As she turned away from the clump of ferns her foot struck something so hard and sharp that it hurt her. Glancing down, and parting the ferns with the aching foot, a single ray of the redly-setting sun struck through and glimmered on what appeared to be the corner of a brass-bound box, protruding from the wet, black soil.

Full of eager curiosity Oriole ran for a spade from the tool-house at one side of the garden. In a few moments she had freed the box from its long durance; but it required all of her young strength to lift it from its place. It proved to be of dark, solid wood—about ten inches by twelve, and eight in depth. There was a brass plate on top engraved with a name which was so corroded by the elements as to be undecipherable; the brass bands and nails were dull and green with rust.

"It is full of gold—I know it is!" panted Oriole. "I have read of such things—people burying their money and forgetting where! Or dying without telling! I wonder if I shall have to give it up? I found it, and it ought to be mine. I'm going to take it home and see what is in it, before I make up my mind. I must hurry away with it before Mr. Gathorne comes back here."

Oriole Darien with the strain of Gipsy blood in her veins had a taint of Gipsy cunning. She returned the spade to its place, obliterated the traces of her work by dragging the ferns over the cavity which she had refilled, threw the flowers out of her basket, labored to get the box in their place, covered it with her apron, and tugging at her heavy load, took the most obscure path to the Lodge by the great gates.

Betty, the little maid, was busy in the kitchen with the supper; her father had not come in; she hurried to get her treasure-trove up to her own room—a large, low-ceiled "bower-chamber" under the eaves, with a casement-window curtained with ivy and running roses. Panting with the labor and excitement she locked herself in and proceeded at once to explore the mysterious box. The key was gone from the lock, but the rusty bolt soon yielded to her efforts; sinking on her knees under the western window, in at which the sunset still flamed, though twilight was deepening over the still, sweet summer world, she raised the cover with trembling hands. Her eyes shone, her bosom heaved—*what* was she about to find?

The contents of the box exceeded her wildest expectations.

Yes, there was gold—handfuls of dull gold coins—English guineas of no recent date—but these were the least interesting of the valuables.

There was an exquisite miniature on ivory of a lovely lady; the setting rich with diamonds and pearls; a casket crowded with jewels—bracelets, necklaces, earrings, finger-rings, an aigrette, flashing and gleaming gloriously in

the fading light; then a package of yellow papers—"most valuable of all, perhaps," thought Oriole, who sat there, pale, dazzled, blinded by the shimmering diamonds poured into her lap, thinking strange thoughts, dreaming strange dreams, miserably, horribly tempted to burn those time-stained papers without looking at them, and thus never in form herself who rightly had claims to these things she longed to make her own.

CHAPTER III.

THE HEIR AT HOME.

There were ladies as fair as fair might be,
But not one of them all was as fair as she.

—OWEN MEREDITH.

It was on Monday the young master had paid Morley Beeches that flying visit; on Thursday he arrived, with a small party of friends, in more formal style.

Up in her "bower-chamber" Oriole Darien, flushed with expectancy, watched the approach of the three carriages which had been sent in the middle of the golden summer afternoon to the village station. Her dark eyes were peering from behind their leafy screen when little Betty flung wide the great gates, and she saw him on the box-seat of the first barouche, handling the ribbons over a pair of mettlesome horses, yet finding time to glance back, speak and smile to the ladies lolliing among the cushions.

A glitter of wheels, a flash of harness, a flutter of vails and plumes, a low burst of sweet laughter floating backward on the sunny air; then the turn of the winding drive under the tall beeches hid the little procession from her view. There was a joyous, childlike smile playing about her mouth as she turned from the window.

Oriole had not yet learned the terrible secret of a master passion—the passion of jealousy which runs and burns like liquid fire along such veins as those which dyed her cheeks that Gipsy red!

An hour later Eugene Morley, fair, pleasant, quite at his ease—a handsome young gentleman in dinner toilet—stood in the great front drawing-room to receive his guests when they should descend from their several dressing-rooms.

The furniture of the long, lofty room was rich, somber and old-fashioned. Some tasteful hand had been at work arranging the draperies of the heavy satin curtains, and filling the quaint vases before the chimney-piece with scarlet roses and tiger-lilies which lighted up the whole room. Eugene, noticing this without knowing that he did so, recalled the image of the steward's daughter with the nasturtiums in her black hair, and his fair face flushed at the memory.

He might have thought longer of her had not some one entered the room who called for his entire consideration—a slight, tall, graceful girl in a dress of clinging, shimmering sea-blue,

"With a stately figure and foot
And that faint pink smile so sweet and cold,"

a string of pearls on a bosom white as milk, and a bunch of marguerites at her belt—to whom he advanced, clasped the satin soft hand, looked eagerly in the sea-blue eyes.

"Irene, I trust you will like Morley Beeches," was his greeting.

"It is more neglected than I thought to find it, Eugene. Still, it impresses me pleasantly. It can be made a fine place, I dare say," with critical coolness.

"You shall change it to suit yourself, Irene; you shall make it as magnificent as you please. There is plenty of money for the purpose; nearly the whole income of my estates has accumulated during the five years I have spent abroad."

A faint sparkle showed under the languid lashes of Irene St. Mark. She was not of an affectionate disposition; yet there was one thing she dearly loved—and that was—MONEY.

Money was the talismanic word which caused her cheeks to flush as some girls flush at the name of Love. To her it meant power, supremacy, right to reign and rule. What was love to it? A shadow—a perfume—a fancy!

Eugene had met Mrs. St. Mark and her daughter in Venice where they were staying for a season. It was reputed that the mother was wealthy and the young lady a great heiress; but Irene knew only too well that she sailed under false colors—that the reputation of the fortune which her father, at dying, had left her, was a bubble which must soon burst, for he had lost all—all—in splendid ventures, and died of the disappointment of it; and she could only

hope to keep up appearances long enough to make "a good match." The two ladies had gone abroad to hide the true state of affairs; and in Venice they had met the rich young American traveler whom they had in their mind's eye as the *parti* to restore their threatened prestige.

Eugene Morley was even a more satisfactory catch than they had hoped for, since he had not only money, but youth, good birth and a blonde beauty which had won him a perfect surfeit of girls' hearts. By a play of utter indifference Irene had led him on until she had him at her feet. They had been engaged three months; the wedding was to take place in the autumn; the St. Marks had returned to prepare the trousseau—Mr. Morley to occupy his long-neglected home and get it in order for his bride.

However, before admitting the mechanics and artists to the house to begin their labor of renovation, it had been proposed that a party should be made up to spend a month or six weeks of the summer heats at Morley Beeches. They had planned to have a gay time, in an informal fashion, in the great mansion. Lawn-parties, lawn-tennis, excursions, afternoon teas and a real masque-ball, if the fashionables of the neighborhood came forward to claim acquaintance in time to participate in such festivities.

"I shall be spoiled, you allow me to have my own way so much," Irene answered to her lover's liberal proposal, reaching up her pink mouth to kiss the smiling lips half-hidden under the fair mustache; then the blue eyes went guardedly around the room whose somber elegance, she decided, was quite "the thing" in the present rage for old-fashioned furnishing, once it was effectively brightened by all sorts of modern touches, screens, plaques, Kensington needlework, costly bric-a-brac and cabinets.

Eugene, slipping his arm about the supple waist, drew her to one of the long windows to point out the fine sweep of the grounds.

He did not dream that a pair of bright eyes were fixed upon them through an opening in a rose trellis near at hand—eyes devouring with a longing gaze the haughty figure of his *fiancée*—the gold hair, the cold, proud blue eyes, the wonderful dress so unlike the child's own plain frock—eyes flashing with passionate adoration as they turned to the man beside her, but clouded and wistful as they returned to the lady.

The other guests came, by detachments, into the drawing-room—Mrs. St. Mark, fair and faded, with a worldly air; elaborately dressed, with an eye to pleasing General Carlington, a widower of fifty-five, who was there with two pretty daughters, twins, Pansy and Violet—Harry Launcelot, a young Englishman with whom Eugene had made friends abroad—Cadet De Witt, a dashing youth of twenty, "in love" with Pansy, and a distant relative of the Morleys, whom Eugene kept in plenty of spending money at West Point, and who was now enjoying a leave of absence—Felix Gathorne—and a spinster aunt of Eugene's, Miss Wormly, whom he had bribed with unlimited black satin dresses and pin-money, to play propriety, as mistress, *pro tem.*, of the establishment.

The company is all down; tea is brought in; Miss Wormly pours it; the young gentlemen pass it; they laugh and chatter; try the piano, explore the library and breakfast-rooms, pace up and down the wide hall and broad piazzas where light breezes, sweet with odors of honeysuckle, new-mown hay and roses, are fluttering about; some of them wander as far as the quaint garden; until birds twitter sleepily in the twilight, wax-candles begin to glimmer in the dining-room, and the pleasant summons to dinner calls together these butterflies of the summer.

As they sit about the table, again some one, from the dark outside, looks in at the animated scene—the pyramid of flowers, the soft lights, the burnished silver, the lovely ladies in sheen of silks and sparkle of jewels, the handsome, happy young host at the head of his table.

It is all quite as gay and splendid as Oriole had anticipated; but, it does not give her the pleasure she expected. There is bitterness in her heart. The scarlet lips tremble, the dark eyes swim in tears. Why?

She could not tell you if you asked her. All unexplainably to herself she wants to be *one of them*—not standing out here in the dewy night—a thing apart from the merry world—a soul shut out from the gates of Paradise.

For the first time in her life this child-woman compares herself with others. For the first time in her life she is sadly discontented. Her gaze dwells longest on the fair face of the lady sitting at the right hand of the master of Morley Beeches. Her white, delicate, high-bred beauty is a marvel to the steward's daughter. The

golden glitter of the light hair, the heavenly blue of the proud eyes, the snowy gleam of shoulders and jewel-laden hands awaken her envy as well as her admiration.

"How ugly I must have seemed to him," she thinks, with my hands as brown as berries and my face so tanned and dark! I wonder he took notice of me the other day. He has quite forgotten me before this, I know. I was a little fool, this afternoon, to imagine he would be looking in the garden for me!"

After what seems to her a long, long time the ladies rise, a young gentleman in military dress springs up to open the door for them, and they pass out of the room. Still she lingers, peering through the trellis at the man who has charmed her. Eugene lights a cigar, leaves the table, strolls to the open window, stands there a moment.

"Ah!" he exclaims, under his breath, and throwing away the lighted Havana, leaps outside and clasps in his arms the glowing, happy, frightened, palpitating girl. "What are you doing, my bright bird, Oriole?" he asks, laughingly, as he draws her behind the trellis, gives her a light kiss and lets her go; "eavesdropping?"

"No; just looking at you, Mr. Morley," she answers him, smiling.

"You flatter me, pretty one!" he says, highly pleased.

"Don't call me pretty! It seems as if you were mocking me; for I know I am not beautiful like those ladies at your table," in a low, grave voice.

"You are a hundred times more beautiful than any of them," very earnestly, for her evident liking flatters his vanity, while his airy fancy bubbles over with delight at finding the child even lovelier than he remembered her. "Not one of them compares with my bird Oriole—not even Miss St. Mark, the belle of belles," and he looked into her face with delighted eyes.

"Don't tell her I said so, little one, it would be rank treason. Now I must return to my gentlemen friends or they will be seeking for me; and I am so jealous I don't want one of them to discover my little treasure. Run home now, Oriole, and dream of me. If I can get away from the others I will call at the Lodge to-morrow."

He raises the small brown fingers to his lips as if they belonged to a duchess, his laughing eyes shoot a dazzling glance into hers and he is gone.

Oriole is no longer discontented with herself. She strays slowly back to the Lodge—her little feet damp with the dew, the sweet night fragrance of heliotrope and clover clinging to the folds of her damp white dress—lost in foolish, happy dreams—"footless fancies" whose wings cannot long sustain them. She kisses her stern-browed, dark-faced father fondly, as she passes through the neat parlor where he sits with his accounts spread out on a table—and goes on up to her "bower-chamber," but not to sleep.

She recalls every look and word of Mr. Morley; then, in the restless excitement of her mood, she remembers the faded parchments in the mysterious box, which she has not read. Shall she read them? She has hidden her treasure-trove nor breathed a word of her discovery even to her father—the first secret she has ever kept from him. Now she unlocks a cupboard in which she has placed the box, looks longingly at the glorious diamonds and the sad, lovely face of the miniature, takes out the papers and seats herself by the lamp.

She hears the distant village bells strike twelve before she refolds the documents and replaces them in their depository. She comes back to the table and stands there staring thoughtfully into the flame of the lamp, a new expression on her young face. She has learned something strange and important. The knowledge which has come to her makes her more of a woman.

"He is in my power," she murmurs, "utterly in my power! I can do him a fearful injury if I choose! Ah, Mr. Morley, it is well your 'bird Oriole' likes you so much! It makes me happy to think I shall always be your friend."

She is no prophet, and does not dream that her passionate love may turn to a hate as passionate.

CHAPTER IV.

"THE GATHERED ROSE AND THE STOLEN HEART."

Was it well of him if he
Felt not love, to speak of love so?
If he still unmoved must be
Was it nobly done to move so?

Pluck the flower and yet not wear it—
Spurn, despise, and yet not spare it!

—BULWER.

FELIX GATHORNE was wandering about the grounds of Morley Beeches, the second day after the arrival of the master and his guests; it was the hour after luncheon when the ladies were indulging in *siestas* in their rooms, and the gentlemen either were doing the same on the piazzas, or languidly knocking about the balls in the billiard-room; profound stillness—the stillness of a hot, bright summer afternoon—reigned, as he rambled on; not a leaf quivered down the avenue of beeches; the flowers in the garden basked in the drowsy heat.

Beyond the garden and the shrubberies, shut in by a thick grove of pines, was a little lake or pool, the memory of which came to Felix as he wandered in that direction, his feet making no sound on the slippery pine needles as he neared the spot.

As he approached the evergreen-hidden water he was surprised to hear the murmur of voices, for he thought himself the only one roving away from the house. The deeper of the two voices sounded like Eugene's; yet he was quite certain he had left Eugene nodding over a novel in the library. The lower tones were those of a girl. He smiled at the idea of his brother and Miss St. Mark growing romantic—they were so little given to it! Parting the branches which obstructed his view, he peered through, meaning to have a jest at the lovers, but what he saw held him silent, in angry surprise.

Under the deep shade of the pines—which gave out a spicy odor under the burning sun—with her small, slippered feet nearly touching the cool dark water, sat a girl; beside her lounged Eugene. But, the girl was not Irene St. Mark. He knew that dazzling, tropical, fascinating face at a glance—ah, too keenly he remembered every soft outline, every charm of color! This was Oriole Darien, the steward's daughter's. She had on a white frock; there were scarlet flowers in her purple-black hair. Eugene held one of her slender brown hands; she was smiling at him—a splendid, glowing smile from under half-drooped lashes dark as night; Eugene's eyes were answering hers; he was murmuring some poet's fancy—

"Our seamen are fledged loves,
Our masts are bills of doves,
Our decks, fine gold;
Our stores are love-shafts fair
And manifold—
Where shall we land you, sweet?
On fields of strange men's feet,
Or nearer home?
Or where the fire-flowers blow,
Or where the flowers of snow,
Or flowers of foam?"

A flush of indignation mantled Felix's brow. He knew his half-brother's quick, imperious temper—he knew his own; he felt how despicable, under ordinary circumstances, were both spying and interfering; but, to turn away now, seemed to him to be leaving an innocent creature to fall into the cruel snare.

Love for the girl as well as anger at the trifler stirred his grave, earnest nature. He stepped quickly out from his shelter and stood looking at them. Eugene colored high as he arose from his elbow to a sitting posture; the girl did not blush at all.

"How do you do, Mr. Gathorne?" she said, pleasantly.

Felix read her utter ignorance in the untroubled depths of her beautiful eyes. The more he saw how unconscious of all wrong she was the more indignant he grew at his brother.

"I am quite well, thank you, Miss Darien. You have a pleasant retreat here for sultry afternoons. May I join your party?" and he seated himself on the bank.

"He means to see it out. Meddlesome prig!" thought Eugene.

Felix began a desultory conversation about the scenery.

"He intends to cut me out, perhaps," reflected the brother. "How came he to know her name?" He fidgeted and soon got up, with a clouded brow.

"I must keep my promise to play billiards with the general. Good-by, Miss Darien, until this time to-morrow," with a smile at Felix to assure him he meant to have his own way. The latter did not offer to go with him, as he expected.

"Confound him! I do believe he means to warn her against my attractions," he mused, as he moved away.

That was just what the other man did intend.

And when Oriole, somewhat embarrassed by his grave scrutiny, and not caring to stay now that Mr. Morley was gone, made a movement

to rise, he begged her to remain a few moments. After he had done so, it was a struggle for him to say what he dared not leave unsaid; he knew, by love's subtle intuition, that to find fault with Eugene was to make himself disliked by her—and this was a bitter sacrifice.

"Did you meet my brother here by appointment, Miss Darien?"

"Oh, yes," she answered him, with a joyous smile. "Was it not good of him to remember me when there are so many ladies at his house?"

"I hardly know how to answer that question, Miss Darien. Did you tell your father you were coming to meet Mr. Morley?"

She shook her beautiful head; the glorious eyes fell.

"It was sweeter for no one to know," she answered, smiling dreamily.

An ignorant child, indeed! Felix endured the keenest pain in going on with his resolve. Ah! if only she could be safely left to her happy unconsciousness of the evil there was, and is, and shall be!

"I hope you will not learn to think too much of my brother," he continued, after a pause. "He has the name of being a great flirt."

"A great flirt?" echoed Oriole, with a look of laughing curiosity.

"Yes; a gentleman who makes himself agreeable to all the ladies. When he is married he will not have so much time for trifling. I dare say he has told you that he is to be married in the autumn—to Miss St. Mark, a very lovely and high-bred young lady, now visiting Morley Beeches with her mother."

She looked up at him with puzzled eyes into which a shadow of wonder and terror came.

"But he loves me! He has told me so!" with quivering lips.

"Already? Yet he has not known you a week! He likes you as his little friend, perhaps—not as he loves the lady who is to be his wife."

"The lady who is to be his wife," she repeated, drearily. "Do you think he loves her better than he does me?"

"I am quite sure of it. A man should love his wife far beyond any other person. It would be wrong if he did not. Ask your father and he will tell you the same. Take the advice of a friend and refuse to meet my brother alone, any more."

She gave a sort of dry sob and cried, passionately:

"I don't care to live without seeing him!"

"Poor little Oriole! No one can be more sorry for you than I am. You will have to learn to control your feelings; a hard lesson, poor child, but there are many things in this life that are hard and harsh."

Ah, how he yearned to take the drooped head to his bosom, to smooth the dark hair, to comfort the poor, proud, passionate girl-heart! He loved her, too; and his was a love which would not taint or blast—but she, sweet soul, could not know the difference.

Eugene, as ever, had come in first and won what should have been his!

She sat quite still a little while, staring at the deep dark waters of the pool, on which the broad lily-pads lay motionless, and over which a single bird was flying high up in heaven; her cheeks were blanched, her eyes swimming in tears, her bosom heaving under its white bodice; then she said:

"I wonder what has come to me! I feel as if I should never be the same again. I have always been such a happy child," and she rose to go.

"May I walk home with you, Miss Darien?"

She nodded, and they went along a grassy path which took them to the door of the Lodge. Bidding her good-afternoon as respectfully as if she were a duchess, Felix turned away and had not proceeded far before meeting Zophiel Darien.

"It is a mean thing to do," he thought, coming to a stop. "I have never before played the rôle of informer—yet, not to do it would be cruel as death," and as Zophiel passed him he turned and walked by his side.

"Darien," he began, very earnestly, "forgive me if I seem impertinent. You may not realize that your daughter is no longer a little girl. She is wonderfully, gloriously beautiful! There are those at our house who realize this. She has no mother—she is as innocent as the angels—you must be mother, as well as father to her, in this crisis of her life."

Zophiel Darien stopped dead still in his path and looked in the clear eyes of the gentleman with his own intense ones. There was that about his powerful face and form, and in his gleaming gaze, which would make one hesitate to be at enmity with him.

"Mr. Gathorne, you may be right. I have not realized that my Oriole is nearly seventeen. Do you mean any one in particular?"

"I am no spy, Darien; 'A word to the wise is sufficient.' I would not speak idly on such a subject. I respect your daughter as I respect all that is most pure and lovely."

The steward seized his hand and wrung it:

"I shall not forget your warning, Mr. Gathorne. Sometime, perhaps, I may find it in my way to do you a service. Let him beware who would harm one hair of my child's head! This world would not be wide enough to hold us both!"

Gathorne fully believed it as he noted the fiery eyes, deep-set under heavy brows; Zophiel Darien was a man of whom wrong-doers stood in awe—before whom his foes quailed.

"I hope Eugene has carried this folly as far as he intends," mused Felix, as he walked onward to the house. "I shall be honest with him, and tell him that I have warned the father—and there my duty ends."

Light draperies were fluttering on the piazzas; gay voices came through the open windows—Morley Beeches was awake again after its drowsy summer-day *siesta*—its visitors on the *qui vive* to enjoy the pleasant after-part. Irene St. Mark was promenading on the arm of her fiancé in too elaborate a toilet for the games of lawn-tennis or archery. Mrs. St. Mark, established in a rocking-chair, was talking volubly at the general, whose two fair daughters were rivaling the cadet and young Launcelot in the ease with which their arrows sought the white center of the target, which had been set up on the terrace.

"Here comes the moody one," whispered Pansy to her sister, as Felix drew near.

"I don't think so. He makes himself extremely pleasant when he is near one, though he is not exactly a ladies' man."

In fact, Violet had already conceived an admiration for the half-brother of the young master of Morley Beeches. His fine eyes, his dark, grave beauty, the rare quality of his low, clear voice, even his indifference to her sex, charmed her.

She smilingly challenged him to take part in the game.

"There must be an object, then," he responded, pleasantly. "Will you wager that bunch of white roses at your belt against this charm on my watch-chain?" designating an exquisite pearl hand, with a gauntlet of gold and a ring on the third finger, set with a tiny diamond.

She gayly assented; and, in a trial of six shots on either side, his arrow struck the bull's-eye four times—and he won the roses. Having won them, he was polite enough to seem pleased, and engaged to take his fair foe in to dinner, and to try a new waltz with her in the evening.

By this time the perfumed summer dusk was falling; the tennis players could no longer see the wires; Irene had slipped up to her room to give her hair a touch before dinner; Eugene went to the extreme end of the piazza, and stood there alone. This was the opportunity that Felix wanted. Excusing himself for a few moments to Miss Carlington, he went and stood by his brother, who turned and stared at him in a haughty, half-insolent way, that expressed his displeasure at the afternoon's adventure.

"It's no use your being offended, Eugene. It was wicked of you to get that innocent child in love with you. You know she will not be one to take it lightly. Is there any real pleasure in breaking a girl's heart?"

"Is there any real pleasure in being a busy-body, Felix? I wish you would let me and my affairs alone."

"Well, I came to confess to you that I have placed the father on guard."

Even through the darkness he could see the flash of color that sprung up and burned in the fair face of his handsome brother. Eugene's eyes darted lightning; but he restrained himself, and after gnawing his lip a moment, to the other's surprise, he said:

"I don't blame you, Felix. I wish I could be as 'goody' as you are. I don't wish to wrong the girl. If her heart will be broken, so will mine! If she loves me, I love her a million times more! I can't help it! Did you notice how beautiful she is?—and innocent—and bewitching? By Heaven, were I ten times engaged, I could not have prevented what has happened. She took me so by surprise."

"Then—have an explanation with Miss St. Mark, and marry the one you really love."

"What! tell Irene I have changed my mind, after bringing her here from Italy to make ready the wedding *trousseau*? I would deserve to be shot for an act like that! I'm not such a poltroon as all that comes to, Felix. And little

Oriole, glorious as she is, is hardly cultivated up to the point of making a fitting lady of Morley Beeches. I must bear my lot, I suppose—and give her up."

Felix turned away in scorn of such selfish weakness.

"At least, let Darien's daughter alone, then. He is not a man to be trifled with, if he is your steward. As he says, 'the world will not be wide enough to hold the one who willfully injures one hair of her head.'"

"I suppose I must," muttered Eugene, with an injured air, as if he had been cheated out of something. "Yes, I will give her up"—a promise made to himself with the sincere intention of being kept.

And kept—for a day or two—with all the resolution the young master of Morley Beeches could possibly muster.

Then, quite by accident—truly by accident—he met her in one of the shadowy shrubbery paths, and having to pass her, and seeing her pale, drooping, changed, he cried out on a sudden impulse:

"Don't let them slander me to you, my bird! I love you better than anything in the world! It is true that I am engaged, but I had not met you, my bright bird Oriole, when I asked another to be my wife. Never mind what others do or say; trust me, little Oriole! What have you done to this face to make it so pale?" and he kissed the rich roses back into either cheek.

A flood of happiness poured into the longing, lonesome little heart; she looked up into the fair face of the young aristocrat with a confident smile; she allowed her small hand to remain in his clasp, when, suddenly, the heavy hand of Zophiel Darien fell on her shoulder and she started back with a little cry. As she glanced at her father she saw a wrath in his face she had never before seen—a wrath that made her tremble, though she did not comprehend it.

"Come home," he said; "and, Mr. Morley, if you ever so much as speak to my daughter again, I will kill you as I would that rabbit there!" He dragged Oriole along by the hand, taking great strides in the direction of the Lodge.

"Little fool!" he cried, with bitter scorn, "you have made me ashamed of you!"

Oriole had been as white as death; at these words her cheeks flamed and lightning leaped out of her eyes.

"If you are ashamed of me, father, I will go away. I have heard you say that no Darien ever brought disgrace on the name. I did not know it was shameful to like Mr. Morley. Mr. Gathorne thinks it wrong, too—he told me so. Mr. Morley is fond of me, father; does that make you ashamed? I wish I were dead!"

"Come home, and let me talk with you," and Darien spoke less angrily.

He was sorry he had so alarmed his child: he saw that she was sinless as the babe in its cradle. All the more his soul burned with wrath against him who was trifling with her happiness.

CHAPTER V.

A COTTAGE IN MORLEY WOODS.

"She has nothing in common with others."

ZOPHIEL DARIEN was very kind to his daughter when he had led her home to the shady, rose-scented little parlor, where her cottage piano stood, laden with choicest music; and where pictures and tasteful furniture attested his affection for the girl who presided there. In truth, his heart ached for her; and being wise, too, he felt that to be harsh with her would be to drive her to some high-spirited step—perhaps to run away from him and his care.

He sat down in his great chair and took her on his knee, pressing her soft cheek to his shoulder, while he told her, very gently, that she was only a steward's daughter, and, although the young heir might admire her and be very fond of her for the moment—seeing her so pretty and bright—he did not respect her as he did the fine ladies who moved in his own world of fashion; and that he, her father, resented it as an insult, that Mr. Morley should be so friendly with her in private when he would not treat her as an equal before his aristocratic visitors.

Trying not to wound too deeply, he yet strove to arouse her pride, of which, he knew, she had a full share; and he held her, and rocked her and petted her until she sobbed herself asleep in his arms.

"She is my own baby yet," he sighed, as he looked down at the lovely face, so perfect in its rich beauty, the long curling eyelashes, heavy

with tears, bedewing the velvet cheeks. "This is no death-wound she has received; she is a child; she will outgrow it."

He did not know. One week ago Oriole had been a child, a butterfly with the butterflies, a rose with the roses—this wretched afternoon had made a woman of her. When she awoke from that troubled sleep of exhaustion, she put on a smile which, for the first time in her brief life, was a false one. Very merrily she made the tea, and urged her father to have his third cup—for she was proud—too proud to show him that she suffered.

Early in the evening she kissed him good-night, and ran up lightly to her pretty "bower-chamber," there to lock her door and fling herself down on her bed to weep wild, hot tears, to moan, to choke with dry sobs, to wish herself dead.

Zophiel Darien, as soon as she retired, changed his linen coat for a cloth one, slipped out the front door, locked it behind him, and took his way across the lawn, through the gardens, on into the fields which lay between the house and the woods. The great mansion was all alight as he went by; the music of the piano and Eugene Morley's pathetic tenor voice singing, floated out on the perfumed air.

"Curse him!" muttered Darien; "I liked him so much; it is ten to one, now, if I do not murder him some day."

His long strides took him easily over the ground; a crescent moon hung high in the deep-blue arch; an owl hooted solemnly in the woods he was approaching; soon he plunged into their somber shadow, knowing his path so well as scarcely to slacken his speed; a faint odor of sweet crushed violets and of leaf-mold sprung up after his steps. Going on for over a mile he came out on the opposite side of Morley woods near a cottage pleasantly placed beside a brook, rippling in the moonlight. A light shone through the muslin curtains of a couple of windows; a dog growled inside the door as he went up and knocked.

"Who is it?" asked a woman's voice.

"Zophiel Darien."

The bolt was drawn, the door opened, and the visitor stepped into a neat sitting-room, occupied by a mild-looking woman of nearly his own age, who placed a chair for him, and resuming her own seat took up the sewing on which she had been engaged.

"You have come for Miss Oriole's dress; it is not quite finished."

"Never mind the dress, for this evening, Esther."

There was a new tone in the familiar voice which made her look up suddenly; but she looked down again without asking any questions; like most people who knew him, she stood slightly in awe of Zophiel Darien, though he had been kindness itself to her, and she admired more than she feared him.

"Esther, I have come to ask you an important question."

She looked up again, this time in real surprise, silently asking his meaning with her eyes. He hesitated for some time; then, with an abruptness which betrayed his embarrassment, he plunged into the subject which had brought him there:

"I wonder if I could induce you to marry me, Esther!"

A soft pink flush made the woman's face like a girl's.

"What a strange idea, Zophiel!"

"I know it is strange; and I shall not be wounded if you resent it, Esther. You are not a marrying woman, I dare say. But, you have always taken an interest in my little girl, and, oh, she sadly needs a mother. I feel so helpless in dealing with her! You are far above me, Mrs. Chaldecott, in refinement and education—you are a perfect lady, whatever misfortune may have reduced you to lead this obscure, lonely life; I do not pretend to be your equal, but I have some money laid aside, I live comfortably, and to-day, when I found that Mr. Morley was already trying to break my little girl's heart, I thought of you, Esther! You were once a girl, and you would know how to guard her—how to talk to her. I need you—terribly."

There was passionate appeal in the dark, strong face. Esther Chaldecott was lonely and sad: for one instant she thought of yielding to this man's wish, and so gaining a home and companionship; yet only for a moment. Her destiny ran not in the same orbit with Zophiel Darien's, greatly as she respected and admired him.

"Zophiel," she answered him, in those low, flute-like tones which made her voice so sweet, "I would not marry an archangel should one

flutter to my feet. Do not feel hurt if I refuse your offer. Which Mr. Morley do you mean?—Eugene?"

"Yes—the young master, of course. The other one is too poor for fooleries like that, I suppose."

"Eugene Morley has been home at the Beeches but a few days."

"He has been there long enough to get my daughter in love with him! He has done it willfully, too. And he, engaged to marry, this very autumn, a haughty young heiress who is now at Morley Beeches! I tell you, Esther, I am inclined to wring his neck."

He was walking up and down the room in deep agitation. Esther followed him with thoughtful eyes; her own face was troubled; she liked Oriole as much as she honored her father, and she was indignant at the young heir for flirting with such a child. She had deeper thoughts of her own, too—mighty interests at which Darien could not even guess, shrewd as he was; her very soul had been stirred to its depths in the last few days.

Finally she spoke:

"I will tell you what I will do, if you like, Zophiel: I will come to your house as your daughter's companion—governess—whatever it is most convenient to call me. I have always been her music-teacher, and we can make the arrangement appear desirable—that is, if Oriole likes to have me."

"She must have you; and a thousand thanks to you, Esther! The aristocrats up at the great house will laugh at the steward's daughter setting up with a governess! What do we care for their laughter or their sneers? My little girl is very fond of you; I am certain she will like to have you. I need not tell you that my child is more to me than the apple of my eye. When will you come?"

"To-morrow. There is no need of delay."

"God bless you, Esther! I would have liked you to come as my wife; but, if you will be a mother to Oriole, my gratitude shall be just as deep."

"If the child needs me, that is enough; my duty is plain."

He wrung her slim hand so hard that she winced, and went away.

After he had gone Esther Chaldecott remained in profound thought.

"It will be better for me there than here," she murmured, aloud. "It is nearer to the house; I shall have far better opportunities for observation and watchfulness. Altogether it is just what I desire. Yes, it suits my need very well. So! Eugene is going to turn out a scamp like his father, Mathew Morley! I am sorry—sorry!—yet, I shall regret less any misfortune that may happen to him! If he prove unworthy I shall have less reason to pity him. Poor little Oriole, beautiful child! You were born for a brighter fate than to fall crushed under the Juggernaut of a Morley's selfishness!"

CHAPTER VI

SOWING DRAGONS' TEETH.

"Love, only Love, is lord of all."

THERE were gay times at Morley Beeches. The jeweled cup of pleasure overflowed. The golden days and half the short, sweet nights were crowded with sparkling excitements of the social kind. The residents in the surrounding villas and country-seats hastened to welcome the heir home to his inheritance; there were kettle-drums, croquet-parties, dinners of the stately order, evening dances and musicales—a constant coming and going of elegant equipages, fluttering of silken fineries, murmur of laughter, music of stringed instruments, dainty teas, flower-decked dinner-tables, glimmer of white dresses on green lawns, promenading of youthful pairs along garden walks, glimpses of high-bred beauties on spirited horses, with liveried grooms in attendance;—in short, a superabundance of that fashionable dissipation possible to a merry company in a grand old place where unlimited means enabled the young host to do everything for the amusement of his guests.

Even the weather condescended to flatter youth and pleasure, wearing its most amiable aspect, week in and week out.

Irene St. Mark was "in her element." She flourished best in an atmosphere of idle luxury. As the bride-elect—the future mistress of Morley Beeches—she received that meed of attention which courtiers pay to their queens. That her lover had grown less devoted since they came to his home—had been *distrustful* at times—almost indifferent about pleasing her, she had not even noticed. Having no doubt of his intentions—no doubt that she was to gain the rich

party for which she and her mother had schemed, and having plenty of flattery from others, she remained blind to the growing carelessness of Eugene; who, on his part, had not the least shadow of an idea of giving up his aristocratic fiancée, but who was in an ill-humor, like some spoiled boy, at being thwarted in his flirtation with his steward's beautiful daughter. Oriole was kept away from him, and that roused his stubbornness and angered him. The more difficulty there was in seeing her, the more resolved he was to have his own way. He had made a discovery, too. Jealousy had made him sharp-sighted, and he had found out that his brother Felix was even more desperately enamored of the dark Gipsy beauty than he was.

"He means to marry her, too," he muttered to himself. "He can afford it, confound him! He does not have to keep up the Morley estate and the family honor, as I do! Happy dog! His poverty is his blessing, in this case. It drives me wild to think of his winning my bright bird! She loves me. She shall *not* be won over to him—I swear it!"—and so he fretted and fumed inwardly, cherishing bad thoughts which he might far better have strangled in their birth.

It was all very well to call Felix's poverty a blessing; but Eugene would have fought desperately to hold on to that estate, which he had to "keep up," had there been danger of his losing it. Perhaps there *was* danger—a new and secret danger; but, if so, he did not dream of it, plunging into a life of pleasure at high speed, and quite looking down on his poor half-brother.

While Eugene enjoyed himself Felix grew daily and hourly more restless. To add to his ever-dissatisfied moods came this strange, sudden, unreasoning love for a young, ignorant girl.

Why should he love Oriole Darien? Why is the sky blue—the rose lovely? He went openly to the steward's dwelling two or three times a week, generally of an evening when Darien was at home, with whom he would chat a few minutes and then ask Oriole, very humbly and earnestly, for a song or two.

The girl had a voice like her beauty, rich, smooth, fresh, passionate; it had been well trained; to sit in some shadowy corner of the Lodge parlor and watch her while she sung was the only happiness Felix had. And, while he listened, his soul in his eyes, often another watched him with a gaze as intense as his own—Esther Chaldecott, the woman who had yielded to Zophiel's appeal and come here to guard his daughter.

She was a sweet, lady-like personage, with a low, tender voice, that won Felix's liking the first time he heard it. Darien had explained to the young man that he had engaged Mrs. Chaldecott as companion and governess for Oriole and Felix had approved.

Did the governess approve of Felix? Not of his passion for Oriole Darien. She read him more truly than he read himself. She knew his intense pride—the real Gathorne pride—a pride tinged with the keen bitterness of poverty, but all the more powerful for it; his reserve, his refinement, cultivation, sensitive tastes.

"There are not ten girls in the United States good enough for Felix Gathorne," she said to herself, studying his fine, clear face. "I am sorry for this infatuation, and pray that he may outgrow it; otherwise I must do all that in me lies to bring Oriole up to his standard. What does the child lack? She has a charm, a grace, a manner all her own; can I improve it? She has a genius for music. I can add to her book-knowledge; beyond that, one may as well try to 'paint the lily.' In beauty she is simply her own peerless self. It is true that she is a steward's daughter. Yet, may not that strain of rich Gipsy blood, which flows remotely in her veins, be as pure and proud as the blood of princes? Her grandfather was the real king of the true Andalusian Gipsies; and certainly, she is the queen rose of all beauty."

If, indeed, Mrs. Chaldecott had ever so warmly disapproved, there would have been nothing for her to say in remonstrance, for Oriole was as utterly indifferent to the homage of this dark, grave young gentleman as to the stare of a carven image. He came and went without causing one ripple on the still pool of her soul—a soul in whose depths was reflected one burning, dazzling God of Day, one brilliant, brooding heaven of love.

What the girl's thoughts were during those long, languorous summer days, even her friendly companion might only guess. She gave no one a glimpse into her heart after that rebuke of her father's. Before that, the whole world might

have read her secret; after that, no sensitive-plant ever shrunk more silently from human touch.

Only, that in her singing, the passionate grief, the passionate rapture betrayed itself. Felix could tell, by the thrill of the glorious mezzo-soprano voice, on what days she had met Eugene and had a smile or stolen word from him, or on what days she had hoped and waited in vain.

Meantime, up at the great house, a little bird had whispered something in the ear of Miss St. Mark. It was harmless little Violet Carlington who first—with a spice of girlish malice, no doubt, pleasant little thing though she might be—asked Irene if she had seen the steward's daughter at the Lodge?

"They say she is far prettier than any of us," remarked Violet, carelessly, "and that all the gentlemen have found it out."

"Any of us?" repeated Miss St. Mark, with a satirical smile, glancing from the unstylish prettiness of the little gossip to her own superb image in the mirror before which she was standing.

"Well, handsomer even than you, then," retorted Miss Violet. "And I have been told that Mr. Morley is her particular admirer. I should not have credited that, however—knowing his unlimited devotion to his *fiancée*—had I not met them walking together in the rose-tree alley, and seen, with my own eyes, him talking to her *very earnestly*, and she blushing and looking down."

"Nonsense! Eugene is always flattering the good-looking chambermaids and dairy-maids whom he meets. It's his way."

Irene spoke with studied indifference, but a faint color, seldom seen under her white skin, was coming up into her cheeks, as she pinned a bunch of dark-red carnations in her yellow hair.

"Dairy-maid! This girl looked as much the lady as you or I," pursued Violet. "And she really was wonderfully beautiful."

"Quite romantic, upon my word!" sneered Irene, calmly fastening a pearl necklace about her fair throat; and, shaking out the folds of her pale-blue satin train, she sailed out of her dressing-room, through the broad, upper corridor, down the staircase of carved oak, to meet Eugene waiting for her at its foot.

There had been a light shower a couple of hours earlier, and he was to take her for a drive before dinner—a *tête-à-tête* drive in his dog-cart, while such of the rest of the party as desired, went out in the barouche or on horseback.

Irene's face looked very lovely and very cold under the shadow of her elegant driving-hat. Eugene remarked that as he gallantly folded a light wrap around her stately figure and led her out to the carriage.

"By George, how different she is from—the other one," he thought to himself.

It was a perfect afternoon. The light warm rain had laid the dust and brought out the sweetness of leaves and grass glistening freshly as they whirled along the drive on their way to the public road.

Irene's blue eyes were on the alert as they passed the Lodge. Yes! up there under the eaves, at a casement window framed in roses and eglantine, sat a young girl. Her head was drooped on a dimpled hand, thick masses of purple-black hair fell around the warm soft arm, her lovely eyes were raised to the summer heaven with a dreamy smile—she saw nothing of earth, did not know that she was being scrutinized by cold, cruel, envious looks. Beautiful! Irene St. Mark could not deny to herself that she had never even imagined such beauty as this! Oh, blooming, tender mouth! oh, shining eyes so deep and dark! Oh, melting curve of cheek and chin! oh, rich, tropical flowering of girlish charms, no wonder you struck a chill of jealous dread to the mind of the adventurous blonde who had the promise of becoming mistress of Morley Beeches!

While Irene gazed the light-whirling wheels struck a stone sharply, and the girl in the window looked down and saw who was passing. Quickly she drew back from the window, but not until she had observed the color spring to her cheeks. Instantly Eugene's *fiancée* stole a covert look—surprised him, with his passion written on his face—and knew as thoroughly as if he had seen her rival.

There is a jealous, unreasoning, unmanly feeling, base and unbecoming, which is redeemed by the hateful passion race as the spirited horse dragging the light pale sun-

tall trees, and the hedge-rows sparkled with the million jewels left in the track of the passing shower.

It was rather a silent drive. Eugene was content to have it so; he was dreaming of that face at the window, unsuspecting of the cruel jealousy tearing at the heart-strings of the proud, imperious girl he had asked to be his wife. It was wrong—all wrong—the course he was pursuing. He was sowing dragons' teeth to spring up as armed men to slay him. He would not think of the future; willful and selfish and unreflecting he took no thought of consequences.

"Irene will never break her heart for me, let me do what I will," he thought, with a side look at the cold fair face.

No, she will not break her heart, Eugene; but there are other passions than love, to fear in a nature like Irene St. Mark's.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PICTURE GALLERY VOICE.

A Peri, at the gate
Of Eden stood, disconsolate. —MOORE.

THE whole bevy of guests had gone out riding or driving on that delicious afternoon. Even Miss Wormely had asked Mrs. St. Mark to share the pony-phaeton with her while she drove to the village to see if there was anything to be found in the dry-goods shops in the way of fresh ribbons and gloves, and to inquire at the railroad station for a package from New York which should have arrived, per express, that morning—a package of the greatest possible importance to the fair denizens of Morley Beeches, as it was to contain sundry masks, dominoes and costumes for the ball, invitations for which Eugene had already sent out.

The only one left behind at the Beeches was Felix Gathorne. He had not cared to accept Violet Carlington's invitation to join the merry young people in a canter over the hills; he had just come from an hour's visit in the little Lodge parlor, and his soul was full of the strange beauty, the bewitching charm of Zophiel Darien's dark-eyed daughter, whose image made the fair faces of Pansy and Violet seem insipid to him. Then, too, he was in one of his restless moods; an inward voice was whispering to him that he was out of place—that he was weak and indifferent—that he was allowing his birthright to slip into his half-brother's hands without a struggle to reclaim it. Eugene Morley lorded it over the old Gathorne patrimony. Eugene Morley ruled in the house of his progenitors. Eugene Morley was spending with lavish grace money which had once glittered in Gathorne coffers. How had this come about? Had that lovely young mother—whom he faintly remembered as an angel bending over his bed in earliest childhood—sinned thus cruelly against her own son? It did not seem natural! There must be fraud and treachery somewhere! Otherwise, she must have sold the rights of her own flesh and blood to that rapacious old wolf, his step-father, Mathew Morley.

How often had he tormented himself with such thoughts! Was not the time come in which to do something more than brood and dream and fret in silence?

Yet, if Oriole Darien had only loved him instead of Eugene, how sweet it would be to give up everything and, mating with her, forget his wordly ambitions, and live a peaceful, idyllic life on his small income.

It was bitter to realize that even this girl's love fell naturally to Eugene. All the good things of earth were allotted to him. Eugene would never think of marrying Oriole Darien—yet she worshiped him. To himself, who would have deemed it the crowning glory of his destiny to win her for his wife, she was simply indifferent.

Restless with the weight of these thoughts Felix roamed over the deserted house. Sweet breaths of summer air came in the open windows; the library looked cool, dim and inviting; but his mood once more urged him to try to make out the mystic measure of the old black woman's riddle:

"Three times one hundred and three
From the tower-bell to the red rose tree."

Twice he performed the absurd journey, measuring and counting his steps: the third time, struck with its folly, he left off suddenly, in an upper hall, where an open door and a soft glint of sunshine beyond wooed him forward into the picture-gallery, a place he had only once visited since his return to Morley Beeches; and that, the day before yesterday, when his brother asked his advice about using the long, empty room for a dancing *salon* the night of the ball. The gal-

lery was in a wing and was lighted from above, with the exception of two long, narrow windows at the further end. These windows were now open, by order of the master of the house, to air the somewhat musty place; and through them came a glimmer of summer sunset and a twittering of birds in the old flower-garden.

There were not half a dozen pictures of value on the walls, except the family portraits—of which there were two long lines. The Morleys on one side, frowning or smirking at the Gathornes on the other. Only one of these painted images had any interest for Felix—the portrait of his own mother, that fair young wife of Mathew Morley, who was said to have died too soon after her second marriage, of a broken heart. He gazed a long time at the fair, sad face as if he could wrest from those dark, melancholy eyes the secret of which he was in quest.

Outside, the sun sunk below the horizon, in a bed of gold and scarlet. The birds twittered more sleepily; the bar of light faded from the oak floor; the frames of the pictures glimmered faintly in the glowing twilight; still he stood staring into the soft eyes of the portrait, lost in gloomy musing. All at once, through the intense silence, broke a long, low, quivering sigh, which was followed by a ghostly whisper on the shadowy air:

"Three times one hundred and three,
From the tower-bell to the red-rose tree,
Diana's riddle is riddled there—
She that is dead will name the heir."

He started, looking sharply about him in the deepening twilight. No one was to be seen in the long, empty, vibrating room. While he stared into the semi-darkness, a whispering voice said:

"Felix Gathorne, despair of nothing you have a right to hope for. You have an unknown, powerful friend working in your interest. Morley Beeches shall again be Gathorne Beeches."

This time, it seemed to him, the voice came from one of the two open windows at the end of the gallery. He hastened to one and then to the other; there were small balconies attached to each, but these were empty; nor could any one have escaped from them without the aid of a ladder. As for the gallery itself, it was absolutely vacant of any mortal besides himself.

He heard the wheels of the carriages returning to the stables, gay voices sounding in the lower hall and on the staircase; the dressing-bell had rung some moments earlier; a luxurious breath of heliotrope and mignonette came up from beneath the balconies; he put his hand on his heart, and found it throbbing hard and fast. No man living was more free from superstition than he; yet he had not been able, entirely, to resist the feeling of awe which had quickened his pulse.

And that mysterious assurance that he had a powerful friend. What could that mean? Who was his friend? A crowd of sycophantic admirers surrounded his half-brother, but, what "powerful" ally had he? Verily, the assurance was puzzling news to him!

He heard Pansy Carlington's voice in the corridor, wondering what had become of that misanthropic Mr. Gathorne.

"I tremble when he does not 'come up to time,'" laughed the girlish voice, "for fear he may have committed suicide, and that we may have to drag the pond. He is quite too awfully handsome to look as glum as he does—not that I do not admire him the more for it!"

"Any one can see, with half an eye, that you admire him, Miss Pansy, quite as much as he deserves," grumbled the gallant cadet.

The two passed on down the now-lighted staircase, continuing their badinage, while Felix came out of the gallery and hastened to his room to freshen his toilet for dinner.

"So, I look like a would-be suicide, do I?" he said to himself. "I ought to be ashamed of that! I ought to be more of a man. Eugene has my patrimony, but 'a man's a man for a' that,' with youth, health, talent, it is a disgrace to go around mooning like 'the melancholy Dane.'"

He got down to the drawing-room in time to take Miss Pansy out to dinner; he made himself very gay and social—in fact, for once, was the life of the party, for Eugene and Miss St. Mark behaved toward each other exactly like polite people who have quarreled, and this cast a shadow over the dining-table.

"She has heard something about Oriole Darien," was Felix's not unnatural conjecture, as he noted the icy civility of the beautiful Irene to her *fiancé*.

Mrs. St. Mark also observed, with a degree of

uneasiness which interfered sadly with her effusive attentions to General Carlington.

"Irene, for Heaven's sake don't sulk," whispered the wise mother to her daughter, as soon as she could get to her after their return to the drawing-room. "If Mr. Morley discovers what a temper you have—too soon—it may be dangerous to you."

Irene burst into a bitter, curious little laugh.

"I shall take care, mother, to be securely his wife before I give him a piece of my mind; but he will hear what I think of him, then, mother. His flirtations will come to an end, then, I feel quite certain,"—and there was a sparkle under her eyelashes which threatened ill for the future peace of the young master of Morley.

"Oh, you are jealous, are you?" smiled the wily parent. "I did not know but you had quarreled with Eugene. A man will always forgive a little jealousy; it flatters him. But don't betray your temper, Irene, my darling! And as to whom you can find about here to be jealous of, I don't understand," and the mother looked complacently at the beautiful, stately girl, so immensely superior to the Misses Carlington, or to any of the young ladies of the neighborhood who had called at Morley Beeches.

Irene's white teeth were pressed into her trembling lower lip, but she said nothing. "Mother has not seen *her*!" was her thought, while the image of that dark, rich, tropical beauty of the girl in the window arose in her memory to half madden her.

The gentlemen, having finished their cigars, came in—all but Eugene, who was missing when Miss Wormely graciously volunteered to play a set of waltzes if the young people cared to dance.

Irene gave one or two turns about the room to Harry Launcelot, who was in raptures at having her to himself, and looked inexpressible things into her blue eyes; but she soon complained of her head aching and asked him to excuse her. He offered to take her out on the terrace; but no, she would go alone; and he was forced to content himself with Miss Violet for a partner.

Irene had thrown a muslin scarf over her head and shoulders; her hands were burning with fever, her face white; she started down the terrace with the one idea of going straight to the Lodge; but she had not gone three steps along the drive before she was met by Eugene, who was slowly promenading before the house, and who, throwing away his lighted cigar, put out his arms and caught her in them, with a low laugh.

"By Jove, Irene, you are a stunner when you are out of temper!" he began, good-naturedly. "How hot these little white hands are! So! you are jealous of a pretty face at the Lodge! You may well be! The world does not hold a more glorious beauty than the little girl down there! But a man don't marry for beauty alone! One wants a lady at the head of Morley House. And my steward don't allow his pretty daughter to flirt; so you need not be so savage, *ma belle*, after this, if you do catch me making eyes at Oriole's window. It means nothing—nothing at all. Those 'Kiss Waltzes' are rather fascinating; come in, and let us try them."

She was appeased—apparently. An intense desire to be lady of Morley Beeches kept her silent. She called up her dazzling smiles, her languorous glances; she floated in his arms light as thistledown; she said sweet things with her head on his shoulder, while they spun around the long drawing-room to the beating music; yet there was a demon in her breast, wide awake and willing to do mischief, if she but prompted it.

How her blue eyes would have blazed with scorn and delight had she known that outside, in the soft summer darkness, crouched the girl from the Lodge, hiding behind the jessamines and honeysuckles at the window, in hopes of getting one stolen glimpse into that paradise from which she was debarred.

Poor little bird Oriole! creature of impulse, of impetuous longings, of intensest feeling! How she started, and how the red blood burned in her cheeks like fire, when a gentle hand was laid on her shoulder, and Mrs. Chaldecott drew her away from the window—through which the golden illumination, the sweet music, poured out—saying in tenderest tones:

"Oriole, my dear, you are no longer a child. You must have more dignity than to come here, in this way, even to see the ladies dancing. It makes a pretty picture, I know; I like myself to watch them; but your father is proud—he would not like it; and, indeed, you are get-

ting too much of a young lady to run about, unchaperoned, as you did when the great house was closed. Promise not to come here again without me, my darling."

"Why cannot I be a lady, too, and live among them?" sobbed the girl.

Esther Chaldecott put one arm about her waist and kissed her hot cheek, answering her almost like an oracle:

"Perhaps you may, and before many years, Oriole; but not by listening to the false flatteries of Eugene Morley."

CHAPTER VIII.

A DISCOVERY.

"Is, then, your love so deep?"
So deep? It is twined with my life—
It is my life—my food—
The natural element wherein I breathe—
My madness—my heart's madness!

—PROCTOR.

FELIX had been asleep about two hours when he suddenly awoke and began to repeat to himself—"Morley Beeches shall again be Gathorne Beeches." It was the night following his visit to the picture gallery where he had heard that mysterious prophecy. He lay quietly musing upon the occurrence, trying to explain it to himself as a piece of self-deception—a freak of his imagination, the consequence of his brain being so constantly busy with thoughts of his wrongs, and ponderings as to whether or not his mother had made a different will from that will produced by Mathew Morley.

Finally, he grew restless—too restless to remain in bed. The night was warm; to him his nervous excitement made it seem sultry. He slipped out to the floor, drew on slippers and dressing-gown, and went and sat in the open window, which overlooked the old, quaint neglected flower-garden, where he had first seen Oriole Darien.

When he went to bed it had been quite dark out of doors; now a wan, melancholy, yellow light shone over the dewy, sleeping earth, for the late moon had risen at midnight and hung in the eastern sky, dimly glistening on the white marble Psyche shining in the garden through a mantle of clematis and fuchsias. Deepest darkness hid under the trees; white lilies and roses gleamed here and there in the open spaces; powerful fragrance came up from dew-wet blossoms; the world was profoundly still; the golden half-moon looked old and haggard—ah! was there not some one moving down there in the shadow of the larches?

"There is some one up and about, though it is past one o'clock. A woman, too! She will bear watching! What crime or secret romance am I about to become a party to? Probably a servant, lingering too late at the gate with her clownish follower! Not much romance about that! No, her movements are those of a well-bred person. What can she be about? By all that is strange, the black riddle!"

"Yes, there she goes, counting her steps!—she has a spade in her hand. She pauses by the statue where I came out."

"Now, upon my word, this grows interesting!"

Hidden by lace draperies and climbing honeysuckle Felix watched the woman's movements for a quarter of an hour—saw her strike the spade well into the soft, rich ground and throw up spadeful after spadeful, not without toil and pausing to rest.

Would she find anything?

Who was she? Was this the "powerful friend" promised him?

No, she had not gained the object of her labor. He, quite as keenly interested as the mysterious laborer herself, watched and waited—saw her falter—rest—and begin to refill the hollow she had dug.

Quickly dressing himself, Felix slipped downstairs, noiselessly drew the bolts of a French window in the breakfast-room, swung it open and stepped out on the sheltered piazza, from which, by keeping in the shadow of a row of larches, he managed to draw quite near the woman without himself coming into sight.

Scarcely had he gained the vantage of a group of rhododendrons near the Psyche, than the intruder passed him, walking quickly and lightly. She was partially disguised in a plain black dress and wide hat drawn down over her face. He noticed that her dress was of silk, and that a heavy gold ring shone on the fourth finger of a delicate hand; but who the person was he could not make out. It was not Miss Wormely—it was not Mrs. St. Mark—nor any of the young ladies visiting at the house—nor was it Oriole Darien.

Determined to find out more about her he fol-

lowed her at a discreet distance. In and out among the winding paths, further and further from the mansion, toward the gates:—was it some outsider thus strangely interested in the riddle of his destiny?

The woman was just about to emerge on the carriage-drive directly opposite the lodge, when she suddenly shrunk back with a faint cry, scarcely heard aloud; then she stood quite still, and Felix, not far behind her, crept through the pink-flowering hedge of weigela lining the path, and stooping low, crept along on the opposite side until he discovered what it was that had startled the lady and held her motionless.

Oriole Darien was leaning out of the casement window of her "bower-chamber." The wan moonlight shone on her white dress and dark hair—her lovely face—her round bare arms. On the greensward below stood Eugene Morley. He was apparently talking to her in earnest whispers, so guarded that even they, who were only across the carriage-drive, could hear nothing. Oriole's face was flushed and troubled, eager, glowing, as she listened to the impassioned words breathed, like the sweet breath of the roses, on the dewy night air. Eugene had come out without his hat, his fair features and golden hair curling up at the touch of the damp fingers of Night, looked very winsome in the yellow moonlight.

Presently a word or two of what he was saying reached Felix—enough to tell him that his brother was repeating those exquisite lines of Shelley's:

"I arise from dreams of thee,
In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low
And the stars are shining bright;
I arise from dreams of thee,
And a spirit in my feet
Has led me—who knows how?—
To thy chamber-window, sweet."

Dreams—dreams—dreams maddening-sweet, of you, bird Oriole!" murmured Eugene, under his breath; and then he threw her a dozen kisses from the tips of his fingers, and went slowly away, back toward the house, ignorant that this little scene had been witnessed by two persons each of whom was deeply pained by it.

"Fickle and selfish!" muttered Felix; "willing to break her heart rather than deny himself the pleasure of having her love him! Engaged to one girl and playing Romeo to another! Ah, Eugene, it is hard for me to forgive you this! I know you thoughtless, impulsive, good-tempered—but, it is wicked, cruel, for you to follow up this affair as you seem determined on, despite all warnings. And I, who love her so, am less than nothing to her! She suffers my silent homage as a young princess suffers the worthless offering of some poor subject. Oriole, would to heaven it had chanced we had met before my brother—curled darling of drawing-rooms!—had infatuated you with his careless beauty."

"I believe Mrs. Chaldecott favors the feeling she sees that I have for her Oriole. She is strangely kind to me; and I am growing curiously attached to her. What shall I do? Tell her that Eugene pays midnight visits to her pupil's window? Bring down on my head the wrath of her I love? Alas, I am so situated that were I again to warn Oriole—as I once did—she would set down my interference to envy—jealousy!"

"How beautiful she looks in this weird light. There, she has gone, and the earth seems darker! Now, what has become of the mysterious lady who searches for the hidden treasure?"

Felix, as he asked himself this question, was startled to observe the midnight wanderer cross the drive and ascend the cottage steps.

"Mrs. Chaldecott!" the thought flashed over him with sudden conviction. "I wonder I did not sooner recognize her step and figure! Yes, she is going in. Now this is strange! What interest can Esther Chaldecott possibly have, in my affairs? What does she know about the black riddle? As they say in novels, 'the thickens.' Well, I am glad of one thing, she has been a witness to Eugene's—no, no, no! attempts at flirtation with Miss I—I shall not have to act the distasteful part of informer."

He walked about in a maze until he had given Eugene a look to those "dreams" out of his mind, and awakened to self returned to his room.

Meanwhile, having silently removed her hat and crossed the little bedroom, Oriole, of Oriole, and the girl was lying.

wid-eyed, on her sleepless pillow, sat down beside her and possessed herself of one soft, trembling hand, that shrank in her own as with a sense of naughtiness.

"My dear, I happened to be up, and I saw Mr. Morley under your window. Your father has said to me, and to you as well, that he wished you to have nothing whatever to do with that person."

The girl remained silent; the light was too dim for Esther to see the sullen look that came over the lovely face.

"Do you not believe, Oriole, that your father has some good reason for wishing to prevent an intimacy between you and Mr. Morley?"

"My father thinks he has a good reason, but he is mistaken, Mrs. Chaldecott. Mr. Morley loves me, and I love him. Neither of us can help it—and it can't be wrong," she added, passionately.

"He fancies you, my poor little Oriole—fancies you as he does every new and pretty toy he sees. He amuses himself with you. He can only really love one woman, and that should be the young lady he is soon to marry. I do not hear that the preparations for his wedding have been discontinued."

"I know all about that," answered the girl, quickly. "He has explained it. If he were not too honorable to do so base a thing, he would have broken off his engagement with Miss St. Mark long ago. Of course, when he asked her to marry him, he had not seen me, and he thought he was very fond of her; and she let him see she was fond of him; and so they became engaged. Now, knowing how she loves him, he cannot make up his mind to tell her the truth. I agree with him that he ought not to—that he and I must be the sufferers. Poor, poor martyr! poor Eugene! He is very unhappy, Mrs. Chaldecott."

"He is a very great sinner!" thought Esther, very bitterly; yet, in that, she did somewhat wrong Eugene. His case was truly much as Oriole had painted it, in as far as he was desperately in love with her, and would—at least, at times he fully believed he would—have been glad and eager to make her his wife, had it not been too late to break with Miss St. Mark without causing her painful mortification and distress.

Where Eugene did wrong was, knowing he was not free to marry Oriole, in still seeking her society secretly, undoing her peace of mind, indulging his foolish infatuation at her expense. Perhaps it was too much to look for self-denial from such a pleasure-lover, such a self-indulgent young fellow, who had only looked on the world as a place made for his amusement. While Eugene was no vainer than others of his age and prospects, it seemed to him only proper that all the good things of life should fall to his share; he looked at his half-brother as a poor devil just fitted to be tied down to a couple of thousand dollars a year.

"He may be unhappy, my darling," said Esther, patiently; "but he has no right to make you more so—perhaps to compromise you in the eyes of others, should his admiration chance to become known. Look at the matter squarely, Oriole—how is it to end? Since he is not free to marry you, he should let you alone."

"I tell you he loves me! Is he to blame for loving me? He did not mean to be untrue to—Miss St. Mark. We just met—and all the rest came! We could not prevent it. Mrs. Chaldecott, I am very fond of you; but if you find fault with Mr. Morley, you will make me hate you—there!"

"Do you hate your father?"

"No, no, no! I love him a thousand times more than ever!—but father cannot understand."

"He understands only too well. He knows the world, my poor little birdling. And he loves his only child too well to like the man who is doing his best to break her heart."

"Are you going to tell him that I have disliked him?"

Chaldecott hesitated. Zophiel Darien was there to guard his daughter. She had a right to keep from him the fact that young Eugene was still pursuing Oriole with his protestations. Yet she recoiled from the idea of playing spy. Felix had recoiled.

"Whatever you, Oriole, will be most sincerely for you—not Mr. Morley's—not my own—not even your father's—only yours. Oh, my darling, rise me that you will never again speak to Mr. Morley except in the presence of others!"

"Promise you that!" cried Oriole, sitting up, with flashing eyes. "Never! Why should I? Why should I be so cruel to him? Nothing on earth shall make me so cruel to my poor Eugene!"

gene! If it gives him pleasure to speak to me, once and a while—to gain a look, a word, I will not deny him that poor pleasure. I love him too well."

"Have you no womanly pride, Oriole?"

"I don't know; I only know I love him."

"What will you do when he is married?"

"Just the same, I suppose—smile on him when we meet and try not to distress him by letting him see my heart is broken."

"Are you not jealous of Miss St. Mark?" Esther asked, in despair, not knowing what else to say to disturb this serene self-abnegation. "Most girls would be jealous, under your circumstances."

"I suppose I am," was the musing reply. "When I see his bride, so fair and elegant, so happy and proud, I know that I often wish she were dead. But, that is wicked! and I struggle against it. I can't blame her for loving Eugene; no one could help that! but, yes, I am horribly, cruelly, evilly jealous sometimes! I confess it."

"Well, lie down and try to sleep, my poor child. I promise you this—that I will say nothing to your father until you and I have talked again."

She kissed the hot forehead of the wayward girl and went away.

"She asks me if I am jealous!" murmured Oriole, slipping her little bare feet out upon the floor. "She does not dream of the wicked passions that rise in my heart. Jealous! If I could only be sure that Miss St. Mark—as some have told me—is selfish and calculating, and is about to marry him for his great estates—ha! there is a trick I could play her! I do not forget the papers in the box! I brood over them, sometimes, until my brain is on fire."

She went to the little cupboard in the chimney, where she kept her treasure-trove, unlocked the door, touched the box with her hand, as if to assure herself of its reality, refastened the door, and crept back to bed with curious half-schemes rising in her illy governed mind.

If she had loved Felix as she loved Eugene!—but:

"The course of true love never did run smooth," and Oriole's troubled passion is fated to bear its freight of misery.

CHAPTER IX.

HE MEANS NO HARM.

"Why do I treat thee thus? It should not be—And yet I cannot—cannot give thee up! I neither take nor yet will let thee go."

For a good-natured young gentleman, who habitually looked upon himself as one of the most amiable of his sex, Eugene Morley had a hard morning of it, after that little midnight romance when a "spirit in his feet" had led him where he ought not to have gone.

Miss St. Mark was disagreeable at breakfast; and, immediately after that meal, his steward sent word he would like to see him in the office—a little room off the servants' dining-room, where business was occasionally transacted. A blush dyed Eugene's handsome face as he entered the office and met the unsmiling greeting of Zophiel Darien. He had said to himself, until he thought he believed it, that he meant no harm whatever, and had a perfect right to have a nice time with Oriole when the opportunity offered; yet, somehow, he could not meet those stern dark eyes without a sense of guilt.

It was not so pleasant to face the father as to make love to the daughter.

"Good-morning, Darien. Anything new on hand?" he asked, striving to recover his usual graceful *sang froid*.

"I have come, sir, to resign the stewardship of Morley Beeches."

"Is it possible? You quite take away my breath, Darien! And, I must say, you choose an inconvenient time to put me to the trouble of looking up a new man to take your place. What has gone wrong?"

"I have made up my mind that it is time for me to leave. The change will not cause you much trouble; the accounts are in perfect order, the estates have been well taken care of, and are bringing in as good an income as could be asked."

"I don't like to part with you, Darien. You have been here ever since I was a boy; I have left everything in your hands—have perfect confidence in you; and now, particularly, I was expecting you to keep a sharp eye on the house while the repairs went on this fall. I have looked upon you, not so much as my steward, as my elder friend and adviser."

"Has your conduct to me and mine been that of a friend?" asked Zophiel, with repressed passion. "I have been very fond of you, Mr. Eugene; but it is time we part."

"Where are you going? What are you expecting to do?"

"No matter about my plans. I shall manage to take care of those I love."

Eugene turned a little pale and tears sprang to his eyes. He looked down at the floor and drummed on the desk with his fingers in an embarrassed manner.

"Don't go away, Darien," he pleaded, presently. "It is not necessary. In ten days you will have the place all to yourself again; we shall be off to the city for the winter; a little after the New Year Miss St. Mark and myself will be married, and go to Florida for a time; we do not expect to see Morley Beeches again until it is in its spring glory. Remain, at least, until then. I—I am willing to promise, if you like, on my word of honor, not to speak to—Miss Darien while we remain here, except in the presence of others."

"The word of honor of Eugene Morley ought to be sufficient," answered Zophiel, hesitatingly.

"It shall be," cried Eugene, looking earnestly at his steward with those blue, frank-looking eyes. "I suppose I have done wrong, Darien; but, upon my soul, if I had met your daughter while I was a free man, I should have been only too glad and too proud to make her my wife and the lady of Morley Beeches. I am very unhappy—I am, indeed. You must have some mercy on me."

Darien's stern anger softened as he regarded the culprit, entreating humbly for forgiveness. No man or woman could withstand the charm of Eugene's winsome looks and ways; and thus it was his selfishness had been fostered.

"You will not abandon me to some stranger, will you?" the young employer added. "I depend on you to oversee the repairs."

"If you are really going to get off so soon, and remember your promise meantime, I will not refuse to stay on the place this winter, Mr. Morley."

"There! I am awfully glad you have consented to think twice of it. I am grateful to you, Darien. And, oh, by the way, I made a promise, when I first returned, to Miss Oriole, that she should be invited if I gave a grand ball. The ball comes off a week from to-night. Will you say to her and to Mrs. Chaldecott that I shall be most happy to see them among my guests, and shall be disappointed if they refuse to do me that honor?"

"I shall give them your message, since you send it by me; but, I warn you, I shall advise them not to make fools of themselves by accepting."

"Miss Darien has a young girl's eager curiosity to see the gay world; pray, do not refuse her this one glimpse," said Eugene, laughing.

"One glimpse—to make her discontented with her own lot in life! Worse than foolish! worse than foolish!" muttered Zophiel. "Better say nothing to the child about your grand ball, Mr. Morley."

He went out, and Eugene drew a long breath.

"Why cannot they let my little darling and me alone!" he murmured. "We are scolded on every side. I warn you, lady Irene, it will not take many snubs from you to make my bright little girl seem so much more lovable by contrast that I shall break off with you in very desperation! Fancy bird Oriole putting on grand airs to her lover! One kiss of hers would be worth ten thousand of my haughty lady's."

Dangerous thoughts, if you only knew of them, Miss St. Mark! A dangerous experiment to allow your future husband to find out, too soon, that you have a temper.

A good many things are "at sixes and sevens" at Morley Beeches that dry, bright August day—not on the surface, oh, no! All is smooth on the surface. The ladies chatter incessantly about the ball—discuss their costumes—the invited guests—the decorations. They have been generously *fêted* by the aristocrats of the neighborhood; a very handsome ball will not be too much to offer in return.

This ball is to be a combination of several sorts of amusement—a summer *fête* as well as a dance; with illuminated grounds, banners and tents, a military band, and a dancing-floor laid down on the lawn. It will be the "dark of the moon," so that the colored lamps and lanterns will have their prettiest effect. Then the picture-gallery is to be fitted up as an indoor ball-room, with its own smaller band of stringed instruments. Before the opening of the festivities—which will not be until ten o'clock, for the hour previous, one of the most delightful features of the entertainment will be enjoyed—a series of *tableaux vivants* is also to be given in the gallery, along one end of which a stage.

with curtain and other appointments, is to be arranged.

Two or three of the most brilliant young ladies of the neighborhood, with several gentlemen, have been chosen to take part in these tableaux. They are at Morley Beeches to luncheon, discussing scenes and characters. Altogether a soft, well-bred excitement prevails in drawing and dining-room. Irene concludes to be amiable. She is to be in three of the four "pictures"—as Marie Antoinette for one—in short, in the characters of the handsomest heroines with the most elaborate toilets. Her vanity is more than satisfied.

One thought keeps firmly in Eugene's mind: "If I could only show these high-bred beauties my bird Oriole! By Venus and all the Graces! what a joke it would be to introduce her unexpectedly, and confound them by her glorious loveliness!"

Felix took very little interest in the one engrossing topic of the day. He brooded silently over the double adventure of the previous night. The wonder grew upon him—what did Esther Chaldecott know about the hidden will? What interest could she possibly have in it?

Then, too, he was miserable at remembering the love-light on the girlish face at the window—a face that never beamed on him with such a look.

How lightly his brother must prize that smile which would have been so priceless to him! Here was Eugene, frivolous, contented, giving his whole mind to the ball—knowing that Oriole Darien was breaking her heart for him. Why should Eugene have everything?—those gold locks, those laughing eyes, that charming way—this princely domain—and the heart of Oriole Darien?

He felt angry and bitter. Often he had said to himself that, even if certain of success, he would hardly trouble to fight Eugene's right to the inheritance—that Eugene was made to be rich and fortunate and did more credit to the Beeches, as master, than he, sober, reserved and somber-minded would do in his place. To-day he felt differently; to-day he felt that he could contest it with him, inch by inch—fight it out to the bitter end.

Shortly after luncheon he left the party of chatters and strayed down to the Lodge. He wanted to see Mrs. Chaldecott—to study her under this new aspect. Little Betty was outside, waiting to open the gate for the ingress and egress of frequent carriages.

"Is Mrs. Chaldecott in the house?"

"No, sir; she be over there under the big chestnut, with her sewing, sir."

The spot indicated was hidden from the drive by intervening shrubberies, but Felix knew it well and soon reached it—a bit of cool, delicious shade, with a bench or two, under the spreading branches of a mighty chestnut. Esther Chaldecott sat on one of these rustic seats with her basket of needlework beside her; Oriole was crouched in the soft short grass at her feet.

Esther welcomed the intruder with a smile and words of friendly greeting: the girl gave him a careless nod and her dark eyes went back to the book she was reading. Felix seated himself on the other bench and began a desultory conversation with the elder lady.

Now that his observation was quickened by an intense curiosity, he noted the remains of extreme and patrician beauty in the delicate, faded face; also that her small white hands trembled so that she could hardly set a stitch, though she appeared calmness itself; and presently, that he more than once detected her in stolen, earnest glances at himself—strange glances that thrilled him with some sympathetic power, when he chanced to meet them.

Oriole was absorbed in her book, so Felix, speaking low, asked Mrs. Chaldecott how long she had lived in the vicinity.

"I was born at Gathorne Beeches," she answered him, in a tone as low.

"How strange it sounds to hear you call the place by its old name, Mrs. Chaldecott!"

"It was Gathorne Beeches when I was a girl, Mr. Gathorne; and so it always remains in my thoughts."

"Do you mean that you were actually born in the mansion?" he asked her.

"I was," after an instant's hesitation and a glance at the girl on the grass at her feet. "I was myself a Gathorne."

"Then, perhaps, you knew my mother!"

She looked up at the eager face lighted with a tender hope.

"I did know her quite intimately at one time," she slowly responded, her lips quivering, but a soft smile in her still-lovely hazel eyes.

"Oh, Mrs. Chaldecott, why did you never tell me this before?" He had darted to her side, seized her hand, and was looking as if he would like to take her in his very arms.

She laughed and looked down, in some confusion.

"I wanted to get better acquainted with you, first. We have met but a few times. Yes, Mrs. Morley and I have been warm friends—before she married that second time—and died—of a broken heart. I know, if she could speak and tell me so, she would ask me to be her dear son's friend—his true friend—as I long to be."

"My dear Mrs. Chaldecott, I shall be fond of you from this moment!" raising the thin wasted hand to his lips with almost a son's tenderness. "To think you knew my ill-fated mother! She was ill-fated, was she not?" he asked, earnestly.

Esther was about to make some reply, when Eugene came upon the scene, and prevented. How handsome—how charming he was!—not Felix's eyes even could deny that. Oriole sprung to her feet and sat down by her governess, with downcast looks and changing color.

"What a glorious couple they would make!" thought Felix, with a pang. "If I were Eugene I would throw over that cold, calculating creature of the world to whom he is plighted, and wed this one, whose every pulse beats only for him!"

And so Eugene thought, more than once, but he had plenty of worldly pride and wanted a fashionable woman as queen of Morley Beeches; besides which, he did not understand Irene—he thought her sincerely in love with himself, and felt that he had no right to wound and crush her by asking for his freedom.

"Mrs. Chaldecott," he began, in his easy way, after saluting the ladies, "I want to talk to you about the ball I am to give next week. I wish you and Miss Darien to honor the occasion with your presence. Promise me that you will come!"

Oriole flashed an eager look at her governess. Oh, the lovely glow rising under the velvet softness of those cheeks—the liquid glory shining in the great dark eyes!

"I need not ask Oriole if she would like to accept," said Mrs. Chaldecott, with rather a sad smile. "Her eyes speak for her; but, after all, it remains for her father to decide."

"I have asked Darien. He hardly seemed willing, but did not utterly refuse. You must tease him into consent, Miss Oriole. I want you to take part in a tableau—to oblige me. I have planned a little surprise for my guests. There are already four tableaux arranged. I desire to introduce another, for which they will not be prepared—a pleasant surprise you see. Say that you will oblige me!"

Oriole's heart beat high. Here was the opportunity to prove to those haughty ladies who had passed her with the insolent, calm stare of high-breeding looking at what is inferior—to prove her beauty as Heaven-given as their own. Could she perform her part without discomposure or ignominious failure? Yes; she would do it—would triumph—would show them all her power over the young master of Morley Beeches! Though it should be her last, as well as her first, she would have her one hour of triumph!

"If you will allow me to choose the tableau, I consent," she said, a splendid smile illuminating the vivid beauty of her face.

CHAPTER X.

THE GHOST AND THE LADY.

"We'll float and float and glide and glide
Adown the pictured hall,
While the merry masquers walk aside
Where the rose and lily call."

THE great day of the ball arrived in due time—a favorable day, of moderate temperature and cloudless skies. Morley Beeches buzzed softly, like a bee-hive full of industrious honey-makers. Tents were springing up, banners being raised, lanterns arranged out of doors; inside, fancy five or six ladies preparing for tableaux, and paint the picture for yourself!

Mrs. St. Mark and Mrs. St. Mark's maid had had a tiresome time of it for a week, subject to the tyranny of Miss Irene, who, delighted at the conspicuous parts assigned her, had yet little control over those fits of vexation which overcame her when the various dresses failed in the fitting, or the draping to suit her exacting requirements. But, the mother would have endured even more in the assurance that her daughter had won the great matrimonial prize—won it none too soon, considering the scanty resources left to them. She could ill afford the rich fabrics Irene ordered for her costumes with such utter recklessness of expense; but, as the younger lady said—if their means gave

out, they could run up bills and pay them after she became Mrs. Morley.

"We are to be married in the first week of the New Year, mamma; and Eugene will be the last person in the world to grumble at my dress-making bills. He is the soul of generosity."

The Misses Carlington had their pretty little minor parts to play; even the old general appeared once as Marshal of France, with Mrs. St. Mark as Madame, his wife, in the scene with Marie Antoinette; while the cadet and the young Englishman had enough to do to satisfy their ambition.

Meantime, while the hum of preparation sounded at the great mansion, Oriole Darien was shut up in her "bower-chamber," with bolted door, putting the finishing touches to her costume. What her dress was to be was a secret, even from Mrs. Chaldecott. She had ordered the materials from the city, by express, and had herself cut and fashioned them.

Darien had opposed his daughter's going to the ball as much as he could without actually forbidding it; but Oriole was in a state of intense excitement and expectation.

"I would not give it up, now, for anything in the wide world, father—unless it were to save a life. I anticipate so much, dear father; it would be cruel of you to forbid me," and, looking in her lovely, eager, shining eyes, the doting parent had not the heart to do it, though wisdom urged him to say "no!" peremptorily.

Eugene had kept strictly to the letter of his promise to Darien; he had not spoken to Oriole except in Mrs. Chaldecott's presence; yet, in that second interview in which the tableau had been arranged, their conversation had been carried on in an undertone.

"We beg your pardon a thousand times over, Mrs. Chaldecott," he had said, smilingly, "but Miss Darien wants our tableau to be a surprise."

He did not speak one word of love or flattery, but his tender tones and ardent looks were as eloquent as ever.

The entertainment opened, between five and six, with an out-of-door kettle-drum—tea, coffee, light refreshments, promenade, music, dancing on the lawn, wandering about the grounds, flirtation under the gay-colored lamps in perfumed alleys.

From seven to eight supper was served in the dining-room—an immense room, usually rather gloomy, but brilliantly decorated for the occasion—a supper, the choicest that city caterers could supply, and enlivened by the exquisite playing of the stringed orchestra.

The number of guests was not very great—only about one hundred; and the picture-gallery gave them all seats, if rather crowded, during the performance of the tableaux following the supper.

Oriole had told Mr. Morley that she should not come to the kettle-drum or supper; she would first appear in the tableau; after that, she would stay for the ball, perhaps, if she liked it.

Mrs. Chaldecott was only too glad to escape appearing earlier with her young protégée; gladly, indeed, would she have remained away entirely could she have chosen. There were associations connected with that old mansion which stirred too deep emotion; but, Mathew Morley lay in his grave, and all those she had known had vanished from the scene, except the two young gentlemen, grown up from fine-looking little lads to finer-looking men. That grand old house would be full of unseen ghosts for her—unseen to the pleasure-seekers but very palpable to her. She had seen those lofty rooms brilliant with aristocratic revelers many and many a time—before the brooding penuriousness of old Mathew Morley spun over it the spiderwebs of silence and decay. When her slender feet were light with the spirit of youth she had footed it to tuneful measures in that long gallery on many a gala night. It would, indeed, be sad and painful, to sit there to-night, a shadow with shadows, in the stronger light of the gayety of others; but Oriole Darien needed a woman's watchful eye and wise counsel, and she must have it—all the more because of her utter innocence, her utter ignorance of the world.

"Wayward, headstrong, passionate," mused Esther, as she sat in the little parlor, plainly dressed in gray silk, with a bit of point-lace over her still abundant dark hair, waiting for Oriole to come down from her chamber—"but pure as a lily and true as steel! A very interesting girl—a strangely beautiful girl—yet hardly the wife for Felix Gathorne, even if he could win her. I regret his infatuation and pray that he may outgrow it."

The delicious supper had been duly appreciated, and now the happy guests were ushered by graceful young gentlemen into the gallery and seated to await the rising of the curtain

which hung across the lower end of the room. Without any more delay than must be expected on such occasions the interposing screen finally arose on the first picture: "HOME THEY BROUGHT HER WARRIOR, DEAD."

Certainly, care nor money had been spared in the preparation of the tableau. The stage represented a chamber of a castle in the days of Queen Bess; the furniture was true to the history of the time, even to the tapestry on the walls, the rushes on the floor, the fashioning of the candlesticks holding the wax tapers.

A lovely lady had just arisen from her carved oaken chair and stood looking down at a bier which four cavaliers had placed before her, and beside which, at head and foot, they still stood, with bowed heads and plumed hats in hand. On the bier the slain warrior reposed, beautiful in heroic death, his sword by his side, his lady's favor on his arm: he looked as if he might have died, after singing:

"My love has golden hair,
And eyes so blue,
And heart so true
That none with her compare.
Then what care I
Though death be nigh?
For Love I've lived—for Love I'll die!"

The stricken expression, the pallor of grief and horror, on the lady's face were well assumed. The black velvet robe, the Elizabethan ruff set off the fair beauty of Irene St. Mark, even as the warrior's bier enhanced the perfect, sculptured grace of Eugene Morley's handsome head and features. In the background was huddled a startled group of attendant ladies, and in their midst the wrinkled "nurse of ninety years" bearing the noble babe, the sight of whom was to set free the mother's frozen tears.

The scene was so well acted that it was almost terrible in its silent power; a long sigh broke from the lips of the spectators as the curtain fell; it was a full minute before they remembered to applaud.

To give a description of the three following tableaux might weary; but, in two of them Irene was the heroine, and, of course, lovely in face, finished in dress, perfect in acting. As Marie Antoinette she was marvelously beautiful; as Elaine, being rowed under the shadow of palaces, to the king's, by her ancient servitor—Elaine, dead of a hopeless love, meekly bearing a letter in her icy hand as she lay in the boat, and being gazed at by wandering knights, she was pathetically lovely.

The amount of applause she received satisfied even her greedy love of praise; queen of acting, queen of hearts, soon to be queen of Morley Beeches, it seemed to Irene that she had reached the culmination of her ambition that happy evening.

"Dearest, you have surpassed my expectations," murmured Eugene, kissing her hand as the curtain came down the fourth time amid a rain of plaudits and bouquets; "I am prouder of you than ever. And now, I request you, with these other ladies, to take seats in the auditorium for a few moments. I have arranged a little tableau as a surprise for you fair workers who have labored so faithfully. You deserve some reward for your exertions; and now you shall have it."

"Another tableau!" cried Irene, a flush rising in her face. "I fear your audience is weary already. What could you have arranged without my advice and assistance?"

"You will soon see," he answered, good-naturedly. "Please find yourself a seat. Meantime, I will explain to my guests that I wish them to remain seated five minutes longer."

Irene left the stage very reluctantly; a fierce jealousy of she knew not what had taken possession of her. A thought of that beautiful, low-born creature at the Lodge flashed over her—could it be?

Trembling in every limb with fear and anger, she hastened to find a place to view the tableau, while Eugene went before the curtain and asked his friends to wait for another scene, which would be presented without delay, and was called—"The Phantom Lady of Morley Beeches."

Felix, through all the scenes, had sat quietly beside Mrs. Chaldecott. He took no part in a single tableau. He had not even circulated among the chairs between the acts, as Mr. Morley's brother might be expected to do—taking his part in entertaining the guests, as a member of the family. The gentlewoman by whose side he sat noticed this with regret.

"He is too sad and grave for his years," she thought. "But, it shall not always be so."

"The phantom lady of Morley Beeches," repeated Felix; "why, what a singular title to

give his tableau!—don't you think so, Mrs. Chaldecott? Of course, this is the one in which Miss Darien is to appear. I have no idea of what it is going to be—have you?"

"Not the least. Oriole has allowed no one to see her costume."

"Ah!" breathed Felix, as the curtain went slowly up.

"Ah!" echoed Esther, almost with a cry, pressing her hand to her heart as she half-rose in her chair and peered eagerly.

A ghostly figure occupied the center of the stage—the figure of a woman, wrapped from head to foot in clouds on clouds of diaphanous drapery till it appeared some misty, impalpable phantom. A few feet from it, shrinking from it, with uplifted hands and a look of awe on his pale features, stood Eugene Morley. Cloud after cloud, the translucent ghostly wrappings faded away, without touch of mortal hands, apparently, while he gazed in breathless fear and wonder, until the gleam of dark hair, the glimmer of jewels, the charming outlines of a youthful figure, came dimly into view.

Fold by fold, layer by layer, the gauzy drapery melted away, until the phantom he had so feared as a visitor from another world, stood before him—an arch smile on her lovely, blooming lips—a beautiful young woman!

A young girl, strangely, deliciously beautiful, with a vivid, dark, foreign beauty, which reminded the rapt spectators of houris by "the gleaming Guadalquivir."

Save those two who had given that suppressed cry, and Irene St. Mark, whose cheeks were livid with sudden anger, none knew or dreamed from whence the glorious beauty came—so young, so bright, so piquant, so very, very lovely that the fascinated gaze could not turn from the smiling face—so like some vivid flower in its bloom—with the dark, delicious melting eyes, the full, sweet, tender little mouth; could not turn from gazing at the dusky, rippling hair, the cheeks with a color "like oleander buds that break," the velvety neck and arms, the pliant waist.

She was dressed in some rich and rare brocade, made in the fashion of a quarter of a century earlier—a heavy, white silk ground, with flowers of pink and silver, blue and gold, worked in the heavy fabric. The belt about her slim waist was fastened with a buckle set with richest brilliants. About her round throat and perfect arms were clasped a necklace and bracelets of marvelous value—large, liquid diamonds, held together by almost invisible links of gold. Similar jewels glittered like stars in her small ears. An aigrette of diamonds in her dusky hair held in place a single nasturtium blossom, that burned like gold against its dark masses.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" murmured Felix.

He was filled with wonder as to how Oriole could have procured this splendid costume; yet he marvelled more at the effect it seemed to have on Mrs. Chaldecott. She had sunk back in her chair, after half rising from it with that little cry, and sat there with clasped hands working together, and with blanched cheeks.

She had recognized them—the Gathorne jewels!—those priceless jewels which the steward's daughter had found in the worm-eaten, brass-bound box which had at last reached the light the very afternoon the young master of Morley Beeches had come to take possession.

"How did it happen that Oriole Darien was wearing the magnificent gems so long supposed to have been lost?" she asked herself.

There could be but one explanation: Eugene Morley had loaned them to her for the occasion!

Then, if Eugene Morley had found the hidden jewels, he had also found the *hidden will*—for they were together—and if he had discovered it, he must have destroyed it, or he would have made restitution to his brother before this!

Her heart sunk in her bosom at this crushing blow.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE BALL-ROOM.

I only know
That were I in your place to-night,
I would not grieve your spirit so
For all God's worlds of life and light.
—Miss Ormiston.

THE look of awe on Eugene's face, changing to surprise and rapture as the white shroud melted away from about the fair phantom, was a good piece of acting—yet hardly *acting*, for the delight and astonishment were real. There had been no rehearsal of this little tableau and Oriole had not confided to him what she intended wearing. That superb toilet was as

much a revelation to him as to his guests. He was too surprised to even conjecture from what source the girl had borrowed those splendid jewels; he only saw her, supremely beautiful, dressed like a duchess.

The curtain went down only to rise again at the demand of the guests, who were allowed another glimpse of the handsome pair. By this time, Irene was furious—biting her lips as she flashed an evil look at the smiling beauty on the stage.

"Who can it be?"

"Where is she from?"

"Some foreign beauty whose acquaintance Mr. Morley made abroad?"

These, and a dozen similar questions were asked by those surrounding Mrs. St. Mark and her daughter; the elder lady shook her head helplessly—she had not the remotest idea who the young lady might be, but fancied, with others, that she must be some distinguished acquaintance of her future son-in-law.

"I will tell you who this young lady is," spoke up Irene, with a sneer. "You may all of you feel complimented to know that she is the daughter of Mr. Morley's steward!—a vain, ignorant little thing, running wild on the place, whose pretty face has tempted Mr. Morley to show her off in this fashion. It is a foolish trick of his—none too agreeable to his guests."

"I never saw her before—where does she keep herself?" gasped Mrs. St. Mark.

"She lives at the Lodge—opens and closes the gate, for all I know!" continued Irene, maliciously. "But this I do know, mamma," lowering her voice, while two burning spots came out in her creamy cheeks, "those must be Eugene's diamonds—inherited—and he has never even shown them to me, their future owner! I regard it as a deliberate insult that he should have allowed another girl to wear them!"

"Hush, for heaven's sake, Irene! You are too sensitive! You must not show him how displeased you are," whispered the mother. "What do you care? As you say, the diamonds will be your very own, before long—you can afford to overlook this freak of your lover. It is only a freak—Eugene is so full of frolic—quite like a boy!"

"Mother, are you blind? Cannot you see he is madly in love with her pretty face?—perfectly, shamelessly infatuated! I have been warned of this before. If we have proper pride we will take our baggage and leave Morley Beeches in the morning."

"Leave Morley Beeches in anger—leave it forever! Irene, it is you who are foolish! We have plotted and planned, for a year to catch this rich Morley—wasted what little means we had left, like water, to keep up the appearance of our own wealth—and now, when the prize is in our hand, we are to open it and let the bird go free! Come, my love, your temper has got the better of your judgment again! One would think you were *really in love with your future husband* you show so much jealousy! Come, are you to wear this dress the rest of the evening? I hope so, for it is immensely becoming. We are to amuse ourselves in the drawing-room a few minutes while the gallery is being cleared for dancing. Come, the company is moving out: there are ices being served in the breakfast-room, and I would like one—it is so warm here."

As they arose to quit the room, Eugene came hurriedly up to them:

"Remember, Irene, the first dance! You and I are to lead off. Excuse me a few moments, while this place is got in order," and he dashed away again, apparently oblivious of the frown on her brow, the cold, glittering anger in the proud blue eyes.

"Control yourself, Irene, and do not run the risk of losing all," her mother still pleaded with her as they went down the broad stairs between banks of lovely flowers.

"Lose all!" The worldly beauty had not the faintest idea of risking the fair fortune she had secured; but she could not quite control that haughty temper.

In a quarter of an hour the strains of the band called back to the gallery the young people who preferred dancing to a promenade in the garden, or a flirtation in the room below.

Eugene came promptly for his fiancée, and they took the lead of the room. Felix, who had taken charge of Oriole after the curtain fell, took a side in the same quadrille. Here was Miss St. Mark's opportunity.

"Mr. Morley," she said, in a low, distinct voice, which she meant should reach Oriole's ear, and which did not fail of it, "I can only infer what your views are on some points of social life; but I, for my part, object to dancing

in the same set with the daughter of your steward. Am I too particular?"

Eugene glanced at Miss Darien and saw, by the sudden paling of her bright face, that the envenomed dart had gone home to the proud heart—he saw the long, dark lashes fall, the sweet lips tremble—and rage filled his mind against the cold malice of the lady at his side. The look he gave her made her own imperious gaze flinch, as he answered:

"Very well, mademoiselle; in that case we will sit out this dance."

He made a motion to lead her away; but Oriole spoke very quickly:

"No, Mr. Morley, Mr. Gathorne and I will sit it out," and before Eugene could remonstrate she had taken Felix's arm and walked away.

"Mrs. Chaldecott, let us go home! This is no place for us," she whispered, her breast throbbing with wounded feeling against its silken bodice, "I am only the steward's daughter, and so ladies will not dance in my company."

Esther's quiet eyes for once flashed fire.

"You shall not go home just yet, my love," she said; "you have a better right here than Miss St. Mark. Surely, Mr. Gathorne, you will not suffer a slight to be offered to a young lady who was asked to come here as a favor?"

"Trust me to defend Miss Darien," answered Felix, with his rare, bright smile. "Here is a vacancy, Miss Darien, and he urged her into a quadrille which was forming."

He had barely seated her after the dance by Mrs. Chaldecott, when Eugene hastened up to secure her for a round dance, which came second on the programme. From that time Oriole did not lack for partners. It was true, the ladies ignored her; not one of those fair, fashionable, amiable feminine creatures seemed to see her—the whisper had crept round that she was only a little brown sparrow in borrowed plumage—but the gentlemen were only too glad of an opportunity to dance with so glorious and budding a young beauty; she was besieged for her hand, courted, flattered, until vanity could ask no more—Oriole Darien, in her rich brocade, her flashing diamonds, with her eyes growing more brightly splendid, and her cheeks more like velvety rare roses, and her young mouth curving in gayer smiles, was the undeniable belle of the ball.

Irene saw it all with helpless resentment. Had she loved the young master of Morley Beeches, she might justly have resented his too evident admiration of this intruder. Being after a rich *parti*—a fine settlement—what was she to do? If she broke with Eugene Morley, it would be the ruin of her worldly hopes. What! give up this stately home? those priceless diamonds, glowing on the arms and bosom of that impertinent, bold creature? Rage as she might, she had to bear it, or lose it all. She studied what to do to have her revenge.

In the course of a couple of hours, chance once more drifted her near Oriole, who was standing on the little balcony outside of one of the two long windows, fanning herself—left there alone for a little time by Felix, while he went to get her an ice. Miss St. Mark also stepping out for a breath of air, they came face to face. Here again was Irene's opportunity.

"Miss Darien," she began, "I have been wanting to speak with you."

"I did not suppose you would condescend to speak with me—there seems to be a social edict which forbids it," and Oriole's dazzling eyes had a mocking laugh in them.

"Only to warn you," went on Irene, haughtily. "You are very young and very ignorant—or seem so! Do you know what is being said about you in the ball-room to-night?"

"Perhaps that I am very pretty," said Oriole, lightly.

"No doubt you have been admired; but a modest girl would hardly care to have all the fellows dangling after her, when not a lady in the room will acknowledge her acquaintance. They say that Mr. Morley admires you too much for your good."

"That is true—too much for my happiness. He loves me, but he is engaged to you—a great pity for all of us!"

"Loves you," echoed Irene, with a bitter laugh. "Yes, as the spider loves the fly! You are bolder and wickedder than I thought."

"I do not mean to be bold or wicked. I loved Mr. Morley the first time I saw him—I did not dream it was wrong; though now, even my own father says it is—because he has promised to marry you. I never expect to be his wife; I know that it would not be right for him to break with you: I expect to be unhappy always"—tears coming into the dark eyes—"but I would rather be unhappy and love him, than love any one else and be his wife. It just hap-

pened—there was no help for it. You need not try to crush me, Miss St. Mark, for I have it in my power to do you a very great injury."

"Ha, ha! because you are certain of his love!"

"Not at all. It has nothing to do with Mr. Morley's feelings; it has much to do with his property."

"Oh! your father is his steward: I see. Is it possible the estate is incumbered, or less valuable than has been reported?" asked the fiancée, quickly dropping her imperious manner and condescending to hang anxiously on the answer of the girl she despised.

"It is not incumbered nor less valuable than has been thought. On the contrary, it increases in revenue constantly; but I know something relating to it which you would give all you possess to have the same knowledge of. Miss St. Mark, I have heard it said that you will marry Mr. Morley for his money—not because you adore him as the one man in the world for you. Do you think, were you to learn that he had lost every dollar and every acre, it would make a difference in your desire to be his wife?"

Oriole watched the fair face before her—noted the quiver of the eyelashes, the faint whitening of the lips.

"No difference, of course—not the slightest," answered the fortune-huntress, with well-simulated indifference. "What a curious question! Had you any motive for asking it?"

"No matter. I am glad that such an accident would make no difference with you. Here comes Mr. Gathorne with an ice for me. Thanks. How refreshing it is," and not Irene herself could have turned from the steward's daughter with more indifference than the steward's daughter now turned from her.

Oriole still stood on the balcony eating the ice, with Felix by her side, when Eugene came out for a moment:

"Oriole, I promised your father I would not speak to you except in the presence of a third person; so I must say my good-by before my brother here. We close the house day after tomorrow, and I shall be very busy. Once away from here, I do not expect to return before May, and then I shall—"

"Bring your wife home," added Oriole, for him, trembling and white.

"I suppose so. Well, God bless you, my dear little friend—my bird Oriole. I would we had met sooner, but it was not to be. Good-by."

He held her tiny hand, that grew icy-cold in his clasp, an instant, wrung it distractedly, and went back into the merry ball-room.

"I think, if you will find Mrs. Chaldecott, I will go home now," gasped the poor child, turning her white, suffering face to Felix.

"Yes, I will find her, Miss Darien. Ah, if I could bear your heart-ache for you, how gladly would I do it!" he whispered.

Oriole's dark eyes were turned to the calm stars.

"Not to see him again for more than half a year! I shall be dead before then. I cannot live—I shall die without him! And, if he ever comes, she will be his wife! Oh, father, father, why did you ever have a daughter, so wretched, so worthless as I?"

CHAPTER XII.

A FATHER'S WRATH.

Had we never loved so kindly,
Had we never loved so blindly,
Never met, or never parted,
We had never been broken-hearted.

—Burns.

LATE in the afternoon of the day following the ball Oriole found herself on the brink of that deep, still pool, set about with whispering pines, which was dignified at Morley Beeches by the name of "the Lake." How she came there she hardly knew. She had been very miserable all day—so pale, so hollow-eyed, that her father had watched her with furtive anxiety; the womanly excuse, "a headache," did not deceive him as to the true cause of the change in his child.

"Fool—fool—and blind! That I could not have foreseen something like this and sent her away to school—or gone away from here with her myself, ere ever he came home!" was his self-accusation.

As he left the Lodge after the mid-day meal, he said to Mrs. Chaldecott:

"Esther, guard her as the apple of your eye until the people go away from the great house. Thank Heaven, it will be but one day more!—and Mr. Morley has given me his word of honor not to speak to her except in the presence of others."

"Yes, Mr. Darien, he bade her good-by last

night—that excuses her white cheeks, and we will seem to notice them as little as possible."

"Yet you will keep her with you?"

"I will. I am going now to advise her to try to sleep off her headache in the quiet of her own chamber."

Zophiel strode away about his business, and Mrs. Chaldecott, gently smoothing Oriole's hair and kissing her forehead, urged her to lie down and try what rest would do for her—"headache" she called it—meaning "heartache." Very obediently the girl went up to her room, where she tossed about on her pillow for an hour or two, while Esther sat sewing in the little parlor into which the stairs opened by a closed staircase.

"She must have fallen asleep," thought the lady, as she stitched patiently away until sunset.

But Oriole had crept to her window, where a cool, moist air had fanned her hot forehead, and a wild desire to be out under the free blue sky had come upon her—she was stifling in that bower-chamber. Esther would wish to go with her, if she knew of her going out, and Oriole wanted to be alone—as suffering creatures often do. She stole into the little maid Betty's room, and down a steep narrow back stairs which let into the kitchen; Betty was out, and she escaped into the thicket of evergreens behind the Lodge without being observed by any one. On and on she strayed, taking care to keep out of sight of the drives and walks leading up to the mansion; it would have been dreadful to her to meet any of those insolent ladies who had treated her so at the ball; while, as for Mr. Morley, he had bidden her good-by forever—or the same as forever to her!—and she neither planned nor hoped to cross his path. No, she only wanted to be out with Nature, so soothing to those who bring their troubles to her.

She scarcely noticed in what direction she was going until she stood by the pool, whose dark surface rippled ever so lightly under the touch of the September breeze. With bent head and clasped hands linked and falling languidly before her, she stood looking at the water and dreaming over those passionate love-lines Eugene had once in that very spot murmured in her ear.

"Was it not Fate—whose name is also Sorrow—"

that brought Eugene there, and fixed his wandering footsteps in pain and gladness, to behold who stood there dreaming?

He had left the indolent ladies of Morley Beeches taking their afternoon nap after the late hours of the ball, and dressing for dinner; he and Felix had had a two hours' chat since luncheon, arranging their plans for the winter; Felix had decided, with his brother's approval, to remain at the Beeches, keeping his room—which would be little disturbed by the improvements to go on—and a couple of the servants to attend upon his wants and look after the house. He had laid out a course of reading, he said, which he could follow more quietly there than in the city; while it would be for the interest of the owner to have an interested person on the premises, while so many workmen would be having the run of it.

"I suppose there is no one at the Lodge who has influenced you in coming to this decision," Eugene had remarked, with some jealousy.

"If you mean Miss Darien, Eugene, I don't mind owning that I would like to win her for my wife; but the chances are against me, I fear."

"Upon my soul, Felix, I heartily wish you had met her first," Eugene had said, flinging his arm over his brother's shoulder. "I know I have done wrong; and when I get away from here I am going honestly to try to act right by Irene. I leave the field to you; when I return here, a married man, I hope to be able to freely congratulate you on having won Miss Darien."

Shortly after that, finding General Carlington asleep in the library and not caring enough about a game of billiards with the younger gentlemen to challenge them, Eugene went out for a walk over his domains. It was truly by accident that Fate led him to the lake at the same time with Oriole.

He saw her some seconds before she was aware of his vicinity.

"Poor child! She looks heart-broken. And it is I who have done the mischief! Poor little bird Oriole, if you could know how bitterly I regret having trifled with that innocent heart of yours! It is sweet to be loved, as you love me; but I would forswear the sweetness, could I give you back your gay girl-heart. God knows I don't want you to suffer! It is hard for me, too!—I never before in all my life was equal to so much self-denial."

"Self-denial! I ought not to be standing here—I ought to turn and steal away before she is aware that I have been here. I will keep my promise to her father. Yes, I will keep it. It is cruel to have to turn away without one word—but I gave my pledge as a man of honor. I must—I will go."

"How beautiful she is! Never has she been quite so lovely as to-day, when I am not to see her again for months. That droop at the dimpling corners of her mouth—those 'woeful shadows' under the tear-dimmed eyes—they make my heart ache."

"But I will go—I will not speak to her—will not tell her that my heart aches, too—yes, this moment, while I can, I will go!"

He was making a great, an honest effort to keep his word; was tearing himself from the place which had such a fatally sweet attraction for him; he had been careless, thoughtless, selfish, but now he was endeavoring to do what was best for this beautiful, innocent girl—best for the young lady whom he had asked to be his wife. He was going away without speaking—going to let alone the young girl who was irrevocably in love with him.

Like most of Eugene's good resolutions, it was made rather late; yet "better late than never." Let him have credit, poor fellow, for what he was trying to do!

As he turned to fly from temptation a twig snapped under his foot, and Oriole, looking that way, saw him and gave a little sobbing, heart-broken cry. He paused, and stood, answering her loving look with one as fond.

"Go, go," she said; "I know you promised father not to have anything to say to me. I do not blame you. Good-by—good-by!" and two piteous tears gathered and ran over down the velvet cheeks.

Oh, those tears! It was hard not to be able to say one kind word in farewell; but—he had given his word, and, as a gentleman, he struggled to keep it. His heart was in his eyes—he could not help that; his lips quivered but kept silence.

"Good-by," she repeated, drawing nearer to him, while he remained as if rooted to the ground. "When you come back here with your bride I shall not be here," and she turned a wild look upon the dark rippling water by which they stood; "so it is farewell forever. I hope you will be happy, Mr. Morley, though you have killed my happiness dead. She does not love you—she loves your money—but I am only your steward's daughter, as she says, and you can break my heart and she will think none the worse of you. She is cold and ambitious—but, you have chosen—and so, good-by."

She was only telling him the truth, yet it was hard to listen and make no defense. He pressed his teeth into his lips and made no answer. She had come quite near him; her beautiful face was flushed now, that had been so pale, and lovely with wet cheeks and flashing eyes—he had not promised that he would not touch her; though that was in the spirit if not in the letter of his vow; and suddenly he seized the soft little brown dimpled hand and pressed on it half a dozen kisses in passionate farewell.

It was in that unfortunate moment that Zephiah Darien, on his way home from an excursion over the farm-land came out of a thicket of evergreens near by and saw the young master of Morley Beeches kissing his daughter's hand.

Red lightning leaped out of his black eyes. "Traitor and liar!" he said to himself, in a whisper.

The next moment something flashed in the rosy sunset air that was not the flash of angry eyes, and something whistled on the breeze that was not the whistle of the blackbird or tarostle.

"And a million horrible howling echoes broke" over the calm deep pool and resounded from the hills and woods, while Eugene Morley, in all the princely glory of his youth and beauty, fell, like a log of wood, and lay there at Oriole's feet.

She looked up in that sort of helpless stupor which follows a shock, but it was not until she saw her father, black and scowling—the smoking gun in his hand—that the faintest revelation of the awful truth came upon her.

"Father!" That low recoiling cry of unspeakable reproach and horror seemed to set a vast distance between Zephiah Darien and the child of his idolatry.

"Do not look at me like that," he said, in a shaken voice. "I warned him—twice. I would do more and worse than that to save you, Oriole. He was a liar and a dastard. He gave me his pledge of honor that he would not speak to you except in the presence of a third person. I

was going away—until he promised me. He must have known that I was not a person to be trifled with. He deserved his fate, and, by Heaven, I am glad he met it! Come away home, girl—this is no place for you."

He did not tremble because he had murdered his young employer—the handsome heir of Morley Beeches; but he trembled at that strange shrinking horror of himself in his child's face. He scarcely dared stretch out his hand to take hold of her to draw her away; when he did attempt it, she leaped from him like a deer, and flung herself headlong into the lake, which there went down sheer for forty feet—the dark rippling water closed over her dusky hair and white garments till only a few bubbles showed the spot where she had sunk from sight.

CHAPTER XIII.

"HOME THEY BROUGHT HER WARRIOR, DEAD."

Look you here!
Here is himself, mangled, as you see, by traitors.
—SHAKESPEARE.

"I WONDER what Mr. Morley has done with himself?" remarked Violet Carlington, as she paced up and down the long drawing-room on the arm of the young cadet. "Miss St. Mark is getting out of humor—just take a sly look at her, Mr. De Witt."

"I think her handsomer when she scowls a little, Miss Violet. She is a trifle too calm ordinarily—don't you say so?"

"If you mean—expressionless—yes." "Oh, that is too strong a word! But you ladies use strong words when you speak of each other, I have observed."

"Oh, you wicked fellow! You are not old enough to be a good observer, so keep your impressions to yourself until you grow wiser. Ladies never slander each other!"

"Of course not. You only insinuate—which is worse still. There, somebody else is frowning now! Well, we had a lovely time last night at the ball, did we not? I only wish there were going to be another to-night!"

"Oh, so do I! Wasn't it just too awfully charming for anything?"

"It was a success. And, by the way, wasn't that glorious creature—that Gardener's Daughter, or whoever she was—a stunner? By Jaww, she was quite the handsomest girl—of her class—I ever saw. I've a mind to flirt with her myself!"

"Then be warned in time. She has a father who will take your head off—to say nothing of Mr. Morley's right of precedence."

"Aw, well, I don't mind. Blue eyes and flaxen hair are my style, anyway," with a killing look into the azure orbs turned up to his own. "Tis rather strange Morley don't come in!—perhaps he's flirting with the gardener's pretty daughter!"

"That is what Miss St. Mark imagines—don't you see? Oh, it is good to see the haughty Irene jealous! She has such a splendid opinion of her own charms she rarely condescends to be jealous."

The dressing-bell had sounded long before; it was nearly time for the summons to dinner. A soft, rich twilight slowly deepened in the somber but magnificent room, when the sleepers of the afternoon, revived by their *siestas* and dressed for the evening, had nearly all assembled. Expecting numerous calls from persons who had attended the ball, the ladies were handsomely attired; the Misses Carlington in heliotrope grenadines over a deeper shade of satin; Miss Wormely in a thick lustrous black silk heavy with jet; Irene in a cream-colored India mull over pale yellow satin with Jacqueminot roses in her hair and belt, and a necklace of garnets.

Irene stood at one of the long windows through which the last dull gold of the fading sunset fell over her tall figure; she did not think of the sharp eyes of the other young ladies when she turned away with such a frown on her handsome face. Where was Eugene? She had been dressed and down a full hour, hoping for a little visit with him before the others thronged into the drawing-room. She had searched the library, the gallery, the billiard-room—gone out on the piazzas—all in vain; her lover had not troubled to seek her out. It was true he had told her at luncheon he should be busy through the afternoon; this did not prevent her suspicion that he was with Miss Darien.

Felix had come in very shortly after the dressing-bell rung; had sat and chatted awhile with Miss Wormely; then, as if he, too, were uneasy about his brother, he had left the room and the house.

And now Crabb appeared in one of the doors

of the drawing-room with his usual pompous announcement of dinner.

"Put it back, Crabb, a few minutes," said Miss Wormely; "your master is not in; nor Mr. Gathorne, to take his place."

"It spoils it completely to put it back ever so little," muttered the butler to himself. "Only to think of canvas-backs a-waitin'!—an' the omelette-sufflay for the third course! I must speak to cook before she gets the sufflay in the oven."

"Unconsidered trifles" these, in the light of the sad tragedy which was keeping the young master from his place at the head of the table. But no one guessed what was impending. Gen. Carlington—to whom dinner was a matter of the gravest importance, grumbled a little to Mrs. St. Mark about the desultory habits of young men, who thought nothing of being a half-hour late.

And then Irene, fair and elegant despite the gnawing jealousy in her breast, turning again to the rose-flushed window, saw two or three men running quickly across the lawn and through the old-fashioned flower-garden. When she saw them running she felt a vague alarm. There seemed to her in their movements more than the haste of an ordinary errand—something wild and full of the imperious hurry of danger.

She lingered and looked to see if she could make out what was happening. The men had disappeared and all was quiet for several moments. She had thrown up the sash and a breath of honeysuckle came to her from a spray nearby; a bird twittered sleepily—then a whippoorwill in a field beyond the garden set up a mournful cry—she was about to turn from the window when there, in the further side of the flower-garden, she saw a dark group, coming slowly, seeming to bear a burden among them.

She stood and watched them come toward the house.

Yes, some one had been hurt! She saw plainly now that the burden was a human figure prone and motionless in the arms of those who carried it. Her heart gave a great throb of fear and sunk down, down, chilled by a sudden conviction that harm must have come to Eugene, the reason he had not returned.

Mr. Gathorne was absent, too—it might be he who was being brought in this helpless fashion to his home! Pray Heaven, it might be!

Yes, in that moment of terror and suspense Irene almost felt that she passionately loved Eugene—Eugene the handsome, the *debonair*—as well as passionately coveted his fortune and position.

Surely, no gayer, more charming, more gallant gentleman had ever done homage to her beauty. The world would look very dull and dark and lonesome without Eugene Morley! She realized it, with a shudder, as the sad little procession came slowly on. She lost sight of them as they went on to the front entrance; then she turned and walked quickly to meet them when they should enter the hall. Her white face was noticed by the company, though she said not a word; a general alarm thrilled the others, who followed her rapid footsteps, and so were there in the now lighted hall, when the broad doors were flung open and the young master brought in by his servants and laid down at his lady's feet.

How like it was to that idle play of the evening previous—

"Home they brought her warrior, dead."

This was no play, however, but a terrible reality. There was no acting in the way Irene wrung her hands, starting back with livid brows and eyes of horror, from the sight of the set features, the blood-stained bosom, where diamonds glittered mockingly through the red defilement.

"He is not dead; his heart still beats."

It was Felix who spoke, with a stern attempt at calmness and to control the shuddering, screaming women; he held his brother's cold hand, and had directed the movements of the men.

"What has happened? Who did it?" asked Gen. Carlington.

"I cannot tell you. I found him lying down by the lake. There was no one in sight. How long he had lain there I do not know. He is shot in the breast, whether by accident or foul intent, who can say?—unless he lives to tell us."

"Have you sent for a doctor?"

"I told Patrick to mount the fleetest horse in the stable and ride for Dr. Sinclair; he is but two miles away. We will do nothing with my poor brother until he is here to direct us, for we may do more harm than good."

For nearly an hour they waited, listening with strained senses for the first sound of ap-

proaching wheels. It was terrible to wait and remain idle—yet that seemed best. Eugene lay on the floor under the hall lamp; Felix had tenderly arranged his own coat under the motionless head; he seemed already dead, and oh, how beautiful in the pale perfection of his young manhood!—the short curls clustering over the handsome head, the girlish lashes almost touching his cheeks; a pleasant look on his features, such as those have who die of gun-shot wounds.

Felix had drooped to the floor beside him, sitting there with bent head, his fingers on the failing, at times imperceptible, pulse.

Irene, too, had flung herself down beside her lover and sat with tearless eyes fixed upon his lips as if in expectation that they would open and say something to soothe her distress.

The first thing Dr. Sinclair did on his arrival was to send her and the other ladies away.

"You shall know whether there is hope—or not—as soon as I do myself," he said, kindly. "And now, we will convey the patient to his bed before we seek to arouse him, or examine his wound," and so the young master of Morley Beeches was borne to his airy, pleasant chamber, and laid on the bed from which he had sprung that morning full of buoyant life and happiness.

The result of the physician's examination was—that the wound had pierced the lower part of the right lung, and was probably mortal; there was just the shadow of a hope that the patient might survive it, because of his perfect health and pure blood.

"Wounds in the lungs have healed, and the sufferers been but little the worse for them afterward. There must be absolute quiet—the fever must be kept down—of course we cannot tell—at all events, telegraph for Dr. H., of New York, to meet me here after the 10 A. M. train is in to-morrow. How did this happen, Mr. Gathorne?" the doctor suddenly asked.

"I wish I could tell you. I went out, about six, for my usual afternoon stroll, and took, quite by chance, the path leading to the lake. There I came upon my brother, lying across the path, apparently dead; blood on his bosom—but not much, for he lay face upward, and had probably bled internally.

"Yes, that is the worst of it; his lungs are choked with blood. It is a sad case. Had Mr. Morley any enemy hereabouts?"

"I hardly think so," responded Felix, musingly, and then a faint color came into his pale face as he recalled the threat of Zophiel Darien. Dr. Sinclair was watching him closely, and noted the slight flush.

"He would not commit suicide?"

"H—? my brother Eugene? He was one of the happiest persons I ever saw—a joyous, easy temperament—and had everything the world accounts best and most fortunate! I had not even thought of suicide."

"The spot where he was found should be carefully searched. I do not myself think it a case of attempted suicide; a man might give himself such a wound, but it is not probable."

"No, it is not probable—not of my brother."

The keen eyes of the physician studied the countenance of this Felix Gathorne—this young gentleman who would be the heir of Morley Beeches, in event of the death of his brother—brother so-called, though there was no blood relationship! studied that grave, anxious face for some evidence of guilt! It had already occurred to the doctor's mind that no other human being could have so much to gain from the death of young Morley, as this man who seemed so sorry for what had happened!

Felix himself undertook to convey to Irene the news that Dr. Sinclair held out a hope—a frail hope, indeed, yet better than sudden, utter despair to Eugene's friends.

He found her walking up and down the corridor, outside her lover's chamber. He had never liked Miss St. Mark—had thought her cold, designing, and more in love with the Morley money than the Morley heir; but he pitied her, then, for she appeared in real distress, and he took her hand, almost tenderly, as she stood still, turning her pale face to hear the tidings he brought.

"While there is life there is hope," dear Miss St. Mark. The doctor says our loved one may live—not that he much expects it!—yet, he does not deny us the possibility."

She drew her hand out of his, as if she disliked his sympathy.

"I do not understand who could have wished to harm Eugene," she said.

"No one understands that. It is a wretched mystery. But, it will be fathomed! His assassin shall not escape."

"It is strange that you found him," she went on, in a constrained voice.

"Hardly strange. I often walk by the lake." "If Eugene dies you will be the heir," she said, and looked up at him, suddenly.

Felix shrunk back from that look as if she had struck him in the face.

"If that is what you, and even Dr. Sinclair, think, then I pray God Eugene may live at least long enough to name his enemy."

CHAPTER XIV.

UNDER A CLOUD.

And what if pride had duped him into guilt?

—COLERIDGE.

A WEEK of suspense dragged its slow length through the house which had been so gay, and at its close Eugene was still living. It began to look as if his case was to be the one out of a thousand which recovered from such a wound. He had not yet spoken one word, since the slight delirium of fever had subsided, for he had been strictly ordered not to; but he was conscious and observant, smiling faintly when Irene hung over his pillow for five moments twice a day.

Felix came to see him, too, every little while; yet took no part in nursing him. He had a hired attendant, besides Mrs. Dapple, who was good in her way. Miss Wormely was devoted. It would have struck the patient as curious—had he exercised his brain enough to think—that Felix, who was an efficient nurse, did so little for him.

Unhappy Felix! He was under a cloud. Too proud and too angry to notice it by denial, he was yet aware that that cruel suspicion hinted by Irene St. Mark to him had been hinted to others and that it had grown and strengthened day by day. With bitter indignation he beheld its secret workings. He had determined to keep away from attendance on Eugene, though his heart yearned to be doing for him.

"They may accuse me of putting poison in his food or medicine!" he said grimly to himself.

At the same time, his solicitude for his brother was made more acute by the fear—the horrible fear—that if Eugene died without explaining who shot him, that damning suspicion might rest on him for the remainder of his days!

"Doctor," spoke Miss St. Mark, on the eighth day, when the physician was about leaving the sick-chamber, "will it hurt Mr. Morley to tell us who fired at him? If we are to take steps to arrest the would-be assassin, we ought to be about it."

Felix was sitting beside the bed. The blood flamed up into his white forehead when every eye in the room turned on him except his brother's. The doctor hesitated, then turned back to the bedside and leaning over his patient, said:

"Mr. Morley, you are only to whisper in answer to my question—speak only the name—no more: your friends are anxious to arrest the dastard who shot you down—do you know who did it?"

There was quite a pause; then Eugene, too, turned his feverish glance to Felix before replying in a distinct whisper:

"I will not tell."

A spasm of pain passed over his countenance, but he added:

"I am not certain."

Dr. Sinclair and Irene exchanged glances which said:

"Generous sufferer! Too noble to denounce the traitor by his own hearthstone! This makes assurance doubly sure!"

"Very well; do not disturb yourself. The matter shall rest until you are better. Miss St. Mark naturally felt anxious to have the guilty arrested—"

Eugene feebly shook his head.

"Very well, very well. It shall be exactly as you wish. Only keep very quiet and be very patient, my dear Mr. Morley, and you will soon be able to attend to the matter yourself," and the physician bowed himself out, followed by Irene, who asked him in the hall:

"Is he really out of danger? Can you assure me of that, doctor?"

"By no means, my dear young lady! There is plenty of danger yet—but there is more hope. We hope for the best. Strange affair, is it not?"

"Not so very strange, doctor, when we think what human nature is. Mr. Gathorne has always had the idea that he was wronged out of the estates—that his mother willed them to her son instead of her husband—and that he ought to be in possession here. All a chimera of his mind, of course; yet who can say how morbidly he may have brooded over it! He has always been somber and—and peculiar, they tell me."

However, all this is only conjecture, Dr. Sinclair. We must be very cautious what we say."

"Certainly; one would not like to be sued for slander, for instance," laughing. "I treat it as one of the professional secrets that come to me," and he went on his way.

Miss St. Mark walked up and down the corridor awhile, pondering several matters in her mind. She should feel very sadly if Eugene died—she was sure of that. Why, she looked five years older already for the shocks and anxieties of the past week!—her glass told her that. She should feel intensely grieved and disappointed; yet—need she therefore look on the world as a howling wilderness and take no hope for the future? Need she lose Morley Beeches? If Eugene died, Felix Gathorne took his place—"The king is dead: Long live the king." Felix was very handsome, with a dark, grave beauty not so charming as his brother's, but, with a power of its own. So far as she could guess or learn, he had never paid tribute of love to any woman. Why be so hasty in sowing abroad rumors of his connection with the accident? She might come to desire his friendship. His might yet be the hand to make her lady of this grand old home! While these subtle thoughts crowded into her mind Felix came out of the sick-chamber and went slowly, with bowed head, down the broad flight of stairs. He did not see her, as she stood in the shadow, but sighed heavily as he passed her.

There is an Oriental proverb almost brutal in its truth: "A live dog is better than a dead lion." Irene, elegant and lady-like, would have shrunk from the coarse application; yet her faintly throbbing fancies, as she looked after the dark brother, were no whit more delicate.

"I must make amends to him for past slights," she thought, as she slipped down the stairs after him, to flatter him into folly, as she had many another of his sex. However, Felix was not to be found.

The house had become intolerable to him. The air seemed to him too thick to breathe, with foul unwholesome suspicion. What! did Eugene, too, suspect him? Eugene, one hair of whose head he would not have harmed. The very Fates were against him! He had expected, if his brother recovered, to be justified in the eyes of all by having the guilty person denounced. Now, it seemed more than possible that Eugene was himself in ignorance of the assassin—even that he imagined Felix to be the offender!

"It was Darien," Felix said to himself, as he plunged out of doors like one half suffocated panting for air. "He is the only man who has cause of quarrel with Eugene!—good cause, too! Darien is not a man to allow me, or any other, to suffer for his actions. I have but to state to him that I am the victim of suspicion and he will come to my rescue by owning the deed. And then—his daughter's name will be mixed up in the miserable scandal! Poor Oriole, innocent as the birds in the blue heaven above her, will be gossiped about—disgraced! Better for me to be under a cloud than for the girl I love! I will say nothing—at present. But I will call at the Lodge to see how they fare. The gentle face of Mrs. Chaldecott I know will not frown upon me. I long for her sympathy."

It was one of September's most perfect days. As Felix walked along under the stately beeches it seemed to him impossible that Eugene should die—should become dust in the midst of this life and splendor of the external world. He prayed, lifting his face to heaven, that his brother might be spared to enjoy the things which were his in such lavish degree. Little Betty was out by the gates, which stood wide open, admitting an almost constant procession of carriages which drove slowly up to the front of the mansion and stood there a minute or two while the occupants inquired after Mr. Morley; then drove as softly away again. Felix encountered two or three in his walk to the Lodge; surely, those faces were cold, or full of suspicion, that looked at him with such slight recognition. Anger and pain burned hot in his bosom; he had not yet considered that he had also cause for fear.

"Come in," responded Darien's voice, in response to his knock. He entered the familiar parlor, which, somehow, wore an unfamiliar look; Zophiel was at his desk, busy with accounts; there was a feverish glitter in his dark, sunken eyes, but he was as calm as a rock to outward appearance.

"How is Mr. Morley this afternoon?" he asked, as soon as he saw who his visitor was. "I see the doctor has made his visit."

"Dr. Sinclair holds out a very faint hope that he may recover; so faint that we dare not allow ourselves to build upon it."

Darien sat staring out of a window saying nothing more.

"Are the ladies at home?" Felix presently ventured.

"No," was the answer, made with scant courtesy. "My daughter needed a change and has gone away in Mrs. Chaldecott's care."

"Gone away!"

"Yes. Is there anything surprising in that?"

"I beg your pardon."

Felix sat a few moments pondering—should he tell this man the suspicions which had fallen upon himself? Finally he decided to wait a little while; if Eugene got well there would be no trouble, probably—Eugene would himself desire to drop the subject, rather than have Oriole implicated. If he died—well, then, no man could tell what would be the consequences to him—Felix Gathorne.

He arose to go, more keenly disappointed at not seeing the two ladies than he liked to acknowledge.

"Wait a moment," said Zophiel, in a hoarse voice, rising also. "I suppose you infer, Mr. Gathorne, that I shot your brother; I did. And I am willing to swing for it, if he dies. He broke his word of honor to me and made an appointment to meet her secretly. I found them together. I had taken my revolver with me, and I used it. I am not sorry."

"I hardly think Eugene would break his word. He is thoughtless—selfish, if you will—but not a liar. You have been too hasty, Darien; and you have brought scandal on your daughter, if this thing becomes public. It will be horrible to have her name mixed up in this business."

"I did not think ahead so far as that. I saw him kiss her hand and I shot him. He was engaged to Miss St. Mark—he had no business to make love to my daughter."

"It is but a common piece of polite flattery to kiss a lady's hand. You should have waited and talked with him—given him a chance to defend himself."

"I had warned him."

"We both know that Eugene loved your daughter far more than the young lady to whom he was engaged; that he would have married Oriole had he been free to do so. He was placed in a hard dilemma—by his own folly in allowing himself to admire your daughter in the first place—but still he was to be pitied, or, at least, made allowance for."

Darien groaned.

"Don't convince me that I did wrong," he cried, vehemently. "I am more than punished already. Do you know what I have done? I have turned my child's affection for me into a horror of me. She shudders if she hears my voice—trembles if I look toward her. Ay, she jumped into the water, after he fell at her feet, rather than have me lay a finger on her! I had a time to rescue her! Did you ever notice a fresh, bright flower laughing in the sun—and the same flower the next morning after frost had touched it? I am the frost which has blighted my darling! You never saw such a charge! Do you know, if he dies, I am certain she will commit suicide! And so, I have to pray that he may live—I, who hate him!"

"I pray that he may live, for his own sake—and also a little for yours, Darien—for you will not care to bear always the weight I see you now suffer from. It is a terrible thing, this that you have done!"

"Ay, don't tell me that! Wait until you have a daughter—motherless—the light of your eyes, the glory of your life—like mine—" he stopped, and burning tears rolled out of those sunken eyes.

"I would it had been I who met her first! Who knew—she might have loved me! And I—I would have asked no sweeter wife! Darien, I still have a hope, when these dark days are a dream of the past—when Eugene is well and wedded to his waiting bride—that I may win Oriole to look on me with kinder eyes. Master of Morley Beeches by right of heritage from my mother's family, and my mother's will, I know I ought to be; but I will not murmur at my humbler fortune so long as I can hope that in some future happy year she will have forgotten Eugene and learned to love me for the love I bear her."

Darien's only answer was a heavy sigh.

CHAPTER XV.

GLAMOUR.

And all my days are transient,
And all my nights are dreams
Of where thy dark eye gleams
And where thy footstep gleams.

—Poe.

"It is very wrong for you to feel as you do toward your father, Oriole."

It was the mild voice of Mrs. Chaldecott speaking. The girl, to whom she addressed herself, sat on the hearth, her chin in her hand, staring into the heart of a wood-fire, which the frosty September evening made desirable; the place was the little woodland cottage which Esther had deserted to take charge of this young creature, whose stronger, more passionate nature threatened to break all bonds she might strive to bind it with.

Well might Zophiel Darien tell Felix his daughter was changed. The blanched cheeks, the dark hollows about the unnaturally lustrous eyes, the desperate look—half wild, half heart-broken—of the whole lovely countenance, were very different from the soft, dimpled, flower-like charm of Oriole's face a fortnight ago. Yet, more beautiful—for it was more womanly. It would take years of such suffering to destroy the exquisite outlines—the velvet of the cheeks, the glory of the eyes.

"He had not broken his word, Mrs. Chaldecott. He was going away without speaking. He loved me so. And my father knew that I loved him better than all the world—and he shot him! He fell at my feet; I thought him dead—dead! My father tried to kill him before my eyes." A shudder ran through her from head to foot. "Do you think I can ever forget that horrible hour?"

"At least you ought not to dwell on it, dear child. Your father was terribly angry. You are too young to understand fully why he felt as he did. It was his love for you—his pride in you—that made him feel like killing the man who would persist in wantonly trifling with your happiness. Mr. Morley had acted very badly; even though he did not speak to you that time, he made love to you all the same. There must trouble come from such conduct. Either he must disappoint a young lady, whose confidence in his promises was such that she and her mother were visitors at his house, with their engagement openly declared—or, he must leave you, my poor child, not only wretched and without hope, but an object of gossip—perhaps of men's laughter and derision. If I had been your father I should have done what he did!"

"My own father tried to kill him, with my hand in his," reiterated Oriole, in the same strange, low, monotonous tone. "I thought he was dead. He may be dead," she went on in a slightly raised voice. "He was very low, today; there was a change for the worse. He may be dead—or dying—now, Mrs. Chaldecott—and I am not with him. He would like me to be with him, yet you keep me here. Oh, cruel, cruel, to be separated even in death."

"Miss St. Mark is by his side—it is her place—her right. Ah, Oriole, in your willfulness you will not see things as they are."

"Am I willful? I dare say I am, since you say so. I can't help wanting to be with him when I know he is pining for me. I can't help wanting to be with him when I love him so. Oh, if my father had not so wickedly shot him we might have been happy together. For, do you know, Mr. Morley is as poor as I am. I could have proved that, and then that proud, selfish woman would have given him up, and he would have been free to come to me."

"What do you mean by that, Oriole? Mr. Morley as poor as you?"

Oriole relapsed into silence, and stared into the fire.

"If you could have proved it, why didn't you?" Esther asked again.

"I was not quite certain that he loved me well enough. I wanted him to be happy whether I was or not. But, at the last, he seemed to be so sorry to say good-by. I am quite certain, now, he would have forgiven me had I told all that I knew."

"Why, what do you know?"

But the girl was silent again.

"That reminds me," said Esther, after waiting a moment, "will you tell me who lent you the jewels you wore the night of the ball? and how you got that copy of Mrs. Morley's dress?"

Still Oriole only stared into the dropping coals.

"Did Eugene lend you the diamonds and the dress?" urged Esther.

Suddenly Oriole started out of her brown study and turned her great dark eyes on her questioner with a sparkle of cunning showing for a single instant under their long lashes.

"Why do you press these questions?" she retorted.

"It would be a matter of keen curiosity to any one under the circumstances. I am deeply interested—more deeply than you think."

"I know that Felix Gathorne is your favorite, Mrs. Chaldecott."

"No matter who is my favorite, Oriole. Would you not right a great wrong if you had it in your power, even if you suffered by it?"

"No, no, not if Eugene suffered by it—no, indeed! Eugene—Eugene! perhaps there is no Eugene! perhaps he is dead!" she sprung to her feet and walked about and about the fire-lit room.

"My darling, I wish you would calm yourself. Come, will you not go to bed? I will sit by you until you sleep—read—talk—pray for you—only I cannot bear to see you so restless and unhappy."

Oriole burst into a frantic laugh.

"Go to bed! go to sleep! Mrs. Chaldecott, I shall not close my eyes—I shall not lie down—until I hear how he is."

"Well, my dear child, if you will promise me to remain here quietly, I will go now over to the house and get the very latest tidings. It is only ten o'clock; I can be there by half-past."

"I will go with you. I can wait outside in the garden. Let me go with you. I shall lose my senses if I have to wait here alone."

"Come, then," assented her companion, with a sigh.

"You think I am willful," said Oriole, looking at her with miserable eyes, "but I am only desperate. If he should die—should be dead! And my own father shot him down before me!"

"You do not think how lonely and wretched your father must be."

"I cannot. I cannot," shuddering. "I cannot forget—so soon!"

They started forth on their long walk. The great Newfoundland, that was Mrs. Chaldecott's protector when she dwelt alone at the cottage, wanted to go with them, but was left in charge of the house. It was starlight, and the elder lady knew the path through the woods very well; but to Oriole's burning impatience they seemed to make slow progress until they emerged into the open fields, when she flew along the narrow trodden way so rapidly that she was obliged to wait several moments for her companion at the last stile, which led into the tangled flower-garden.

"Wait here, my darling," said Esther, seating Oriole in the summer-house. "I will not be gone more than twenty minutes, probably. Pray Heaven, the news may be better than we anticipate."

There were a few lingering sprays of blossoms still on the honeysuckle which wreathed the little summer-house. The girl could not see the blossoms but their perfume was palpable.

It was here they had sat that first afternoon for a full hour, while the sun set and the place was full of sweet odors, and Mr. Morley, so pleasant, so beautiful, chatted to her about his coming home.

Tears rushed to her eyes—the first tears which had moistened their burning heat since that horrible shock by the lakeside. So kind, so charming, so wonderful in his easy grace and beauty, so condescending to her poor little self, had she not adored him from that hour?

But Oriole's thoughts were suddenly drawn away from this picture of memory to something which was happening close at hand. She heard low voices, drawing nearer as they talked; and through the lattice-work saw, in the dim starlight, two ladies, with white wraps about their heads and shoulders, who came to a full pause on the gravel-walk not four feet from where she was sitting. She knew them—Mrs. St. Mark and her daughter. The cold, clear starlight fell on the pale, handsome features of Irene revealing them distinctly to one who had been out as long in the darkness as Oriole. There was a frown on her fair forehead; she spoke impatiently, though in suppressed tones:

"I tell you, the doctor has almost given up hope. There is an increase of fever, which means more inflammation, and this may be followed by the worst consequences. He told me himself he hardly thought his patient would live twenty-four hours."

"What do you propose to do? Can you save him, Irene?"

"I thought I had made my meaning sufficiently plain, mother: I propose to marry him—at once."

"Marry a dying man! Make yourself a widow at twenty!"

"Marry him, of course. You are very dull, mother. Are we to lose all at this late hour? As you have often pointed out to me, we have spent a year and much money bringing affairs to their present condition. It is known that we were to be married so soon, that I will have to go into mourning and spend almost as much

time in black as if I were his widow instead of only his betrothed. And what will I gain?—nothing! Yet our affairs, as you say, are in a desperate strait. As Eugene Morley's wife—ay, though only his wife one single hour—I shall have one-third of this great estate, and his personal property, and those lovely jewels, if he chooses to will them to me."

"I see. You are right, Irene—sharper than your mother, for once! But, how will you bring about this 'consummation, devoutly to be wished?' Your motive—will it not be suspected?"

"I have only to deal with Eugene. Others can say or do what they choose. He is unaware of his danger—thinks he is recovering. I can go to him, shedding a few tears, and whisper to him how much happier I should be, as his wife, free to nurse him, to be with him all the time. I can tell him how little I care for a ceremonious wedding, a few weeks later—how I long to know myself his wife. He is generous and unsuspicious—more so than one in ten thousand—and I can easily make him believe all that I wish. Mother, you know the Rev. Harvey Hermitage is at Morley Beeches to-night; he is having his supper, along with the doctor, in the dining-room this moment, and intends remaining until he sees how this illness terminates. There is no reason why I should not be mistress of Morley Beeches before the clock strikes twelve this night!"

"If that is your idea, Irene, there is no time to lose."

"No time to lose. You say right, mother!—there is no time to lose!"

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to Eugene's bedside to ask him to marry me."

"And if you fail?"

"If I fail! In my vocabulary 'there's no such word as fail.' Yet, if I should fail—or it should be too late—I shall not even then be in despair, mother—Mr. Gathorne is the heir in that case; and Mr. Gathorne is young, unmarried, and unengaged. I have been already making myself agreeable to him. Not that I could ever fancy him as I do Eugene! He is quite too somber for me. Poor Eugene! He was all sunshine," with a sigh. "I was very, very fond of him, after a fashion, mamma. If he will only get well, I shall be more than satisfied," and she brushed away a single tear. "Yes, mamma, I shall be very sorry if Eugene dies. He is really my *beau idéal*. Yet—one cannot afford to have too much sentiment in this great, grasping world where some one forever stands ready to crowd you out if you will allow them! Eugene, if possible, mamma!—If not, that dark-browed brother! Do you know, I believe Felix shot Eugene? He is aware that I suspect him—that is one of my strong holds upon him, in case—but, time flies, and I must be about my night's work. I had dreamed of a splendid wedding ceremony—of a brilliant season in society; now, I care only to secure what I have so long considered my own. Come, mother, as you say, there is no time to lose! A wife to-night—a widow to-morrow, perhaps!—this is a strange world, *ma mère!*"

With a low, bitter laugh that sounded much like a strangled sob, Irene took her mother's arm and hurried her along the path in the direction of the house.

Oriole sprung to her feet, rushed out upon the path and looked after them. There was a burning mist over her eyes, a dreadful pain in her heart, the solid earth seemed to reel under her feet. Eugene was thought to be dying! This heartless, calculating woman of the world was about to make a reckless, shameless effort to secure what she prized more than her young gold-haired lover—his property!

It was not *that!* Oriole could have laughed at *that!* Oh, what a sweet, what a perfect revenge she could enjoy in that case! But—if Eugene lived—as oh, pray God, he might!—if he got well, this girl would be his wife! She, who could coolly plot to marry another, in the very hour her lover lay in mortal peril, would be Eugene's wife.

"Never!" cried Oriole, in desperation. "No, I will call her back—I will tell her the truth—and then we will see if she still longs to be Eugene Morley's widow!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WILL OF THE LATE MRS. MORLEY.

I lighted my lamp at the dying flame
And crept up the stairs that creaked from fright,
Till into the chamber of death I came,
Where she lay, all in white.

—OWEN MEREDITH.

MIDNIGHT darkness over the world and over Gathorne Court.

A lovely lady, dead, shrouded and in her coffin.

A black woman, still as a statue, sitting at its foot.

The great house was full of people who had come to attend the funeral—which was to take place on the next day but one—all in their beds and sleeping; since the dead lady's maid and lifelong personal attendant, the faithful creature who had closed the dying eyes, had insisted in holding, unaided, the night-watches by the corpse. A desolate autumn wind moaned about the open windows of the large chamber like some wailing spirit calling on the soul of the dead to come forth and join it in its wanderings.

The watcher did not mind this; but she raised her bowed head and fixed her great glowing eyes on the door when she heard some one outside of it in the hall, and so saw the master when he came in, lamp in hand, stealthily closing the door after him.

The room was dimly lighted, but the flare of the lamp he carried revealed his face distinctly; the dark frown upon it would have struck terror to any heart less courageous than that of the colored woman whose gaze steadily confronted him as he came to the side of the coffin.

"Diana," he began, with only a glance at the beautiful pale face of his dead wife, "where are Mrs. Morley's jewels, her miniature on ivory and the deeds of her properties in New Orleans and St. Louis?"

"Are they not in your safe, master, where you placed them after she was taken ill?"

"Some one has borrowed the key of the safe and removed them without my knowledge or consent. Do you know, Diana, that such an act is robbery? Everything is *mine* now, and whoever has done this shall be sent to prison."

"Very well, master; I can prove I have not been in the room where the safe is since mistress died."

"I know that very well," with a savage smile; "it was *before* her death. Do not seek to cope with me. I want those things—also the copy of her will which she gave you for safe-keeping."

He stood close to her, holding the lamp to her face—for the life of her she could not control the slightest possible start and wincing of the eyes; how had he discovered that a copy of the will had been made and given to her?

"Why don't you speak?" he hissed, after a moment's silence.

"I have nothing to say, master. If my dear mistress gave me anything to keep for her, be sure I shall obey her."

He stared at her as if such defiance on her part were incredible. His hand began to shake with the passion which grew on him until he was compelled to go and set down the lamp before the veiled mirror of the dressing-bureau; then he returned and confronted Diana, who had arisen and stood tall and erect to meet him.

"The things are mine; give them to me."

"Whatever she put in my hands was for her son, and I shall keep it for him until he is of age."

"Which son?" sneered the master.

"Not yours, Mr. Mathew Morley—her own little Felix, the proper heir of his mother's fortune. You married my poor darling for her money—you broke her heart—but you shall not rob her little boy of the Gathorne estates if I can prevent it."

"You prevent it, insolent slave!" His arm was raised to fling her to the floor, yet she did not flinch; superb in her courage the black woman stood motionless, like a Juno carved out of ebony. Something looked out of her eyes which baffled him. He did not strike her; he swallowed the curses which rose to his lips; but there was a sneer of infernal malice on his hard, handsome features as he turned away—a sneer which filled Diana with far more terror than his threats or his rage had done. He walked up and down the floor a few times, never turning a glance on the lovely dead as he passed the coffin, then, again approached the faithful watcher.

"Look you, Diana, Mrs. Morley was not in her right mind when she made the will of which you have a copy; therefore, that will is so much waste paper. Before she was taken ill, while yet she was perfectly sane, she made a different will, which must remain the legal one; that will left everything to me—her husband—with the request that, at my death, it be equally divided between the two boys, provided both were living, or to the remaining one, if the other should have died. Such a disposition of her property is sensible—just what her affection for me would lead her to make. I explain this to you that

you may see how useless it will be for you to gossip or make talk about the matter—how worse than useless to produce that later will, made after sickness had destroyed her mind. As to the jewels, they are among the finest in America—worth a great deal of money; you surely have too much good sense to imagine that you have a right to withhold them. I shall expect you to produce them before the will is read. I am master here. One breath of scandal from your lips—one whisper against me or my intentions—and it will be the worse for you. I take it for granted you wish to remain with little Felix—you cannot do so as the enemy of the master of the house. You must be friendly to me if you wish to remain here. Do you understand?"

She nodded her head; her great eyes snapped like live coals; once or twice she had opened her mouth as if to speak, but had closed it with firm repression; her bosom heaved, but she said nothing in acceptance or rejection of his proposition.

He took up his lamp and crept away as stealthily as he had come; still with never a look at the beautiful dead face of his young wife.

When he was gone the black nurse smote her breast, moaned, rocked to and fro—

"He will get me out of the way," she plained; "there will be no one to befriend my darling's child! His own boy will get all there is—ay, and little Felix will have some accident happen to him to get him out of the way. Oh, I am frightened to my very soul—not for myself, but for the child. I swore to her I would protect him—but I shall not be allowed to do it. I saw it in his look! What can a poor black servant do against the power of Mathew Morley?"

A dry wind sobbed and moaned about the house; black clouds scudded before a ghostly half-moon; an owl, out in the garden, hooted solemnly; Diana, taking a candle, went into an adjoining room, where two lovely children, one five, the other four years of age, and both boys, slept as sweetly as if their fair mother did not lie, white and shrouded, in her coffin, near by. She stood by the cot of the younger sleeper a long time, gazing fondly on the rosy face; then returned to her watch by the dead.

The following day was long and dreary at Morley Beeches. The funeral had to be delayed on account of friends arriving from a distance; but it was expected to take place on the morrow.

Meantime, the wind which had begun the previous night, was rising and bringing up a storm. All day the dull, leaden clouds were thickening; but the rain did not begin to fall until after dark. By that time the wind was blowing tempestuously. The slim young beeches along the drive were tossed wildly up and down; there was a loud roaring of hail and rain, accompanied by vivid, incessant lightning. Diana, still holding her faithful watch, not proof against the superstitions of her race, became frightened about eleven o'clock, and went for one of the maids to come and sit with her. While she was absent, in the attic story, trying to arouse the sleepy girl she desired to have with her, there came a thunderbolt which seemed to play around and about her, while a deafening crash filled her ears. For several moments she was too paralyzed to stir.

The first thing she heard, on coming to her senses, was some one crying, in the lower hall:

"The house has been struck by lightning!" and this was followed by the screams of terrified ladies rushing from their bed-chambers into the corridors.

Diana rushed down from the attic to the second floor, in the south-western corner of which were situated the apartments of her mistress. The air was full of sulphurous fumes. As she opened the door leading into the death-chamber she discovered that the lightning had set the room ablaze. The children were in a smaller chamber, adjoining. Crying: "Fire! fire!" she rushed through the smoke and flames into this chamber, which had no egress except through the larger one which was on fire.

The floor of this room being covered with India matting and the draperies of embroidered Indian mull, the six or eight minutes since the lightning entered it had been sufficient to make the attempt to carry the children through it most dangerous. Diana immediately closed the door between the two rooms, flung open a window which opened on a small balcony, tore the bedding into strips and lowered the little ones safely to the soft turf of the lawn underneath.

It was thought, for years, that she must then have ventured into the burning apartment, either to attempt to remove Mrs. Morley's body, or for some other important purpose, since she never reappeared. That wing of Morley

Beeches was burned to the ground: but, the heavy rain, combined with the desperate exertions of the servants and visitors, saved the main part of the grand old mansion. No injury which a few days' labor would not repair was done to the other apartments; but the funeral for which so many had come together did not take place—God's awful visitation upon the living and the dead had rendered that impossible.

Before they separated, however, the family lawyer read the will of the late Mrs. Morley, which left her whole great property to her husband, Mathew Morley, with the desire that, at his death, it should be divided equally between her son and his son.

For, Mrs. Morley had been a wealthy young widow, with one little child, two years of age, when Mr. Morley married her; and he had been a widower, also with a son aged three.

There was a great deal of surprise and resentment—not to say suspicion—among the Gathornes, when her will was read; but it could not be disproved, and they had to submit.

Mathew Morley became the richest man of his county; the wing was rebuilt on the mansion—once Gathorne Court, but renamed Morley Beeches; the two boys were brought up together. Years rolled away; one day, when Eugene Morley was of age and Felix Gathorne twenty, the head of the house died. Again a "last will and testament" was read in the old oak library: Mathew Morley had ignored the request of her who had left him all that he had, and passed the great estate down to his own son, undivided, leaving Felix only an annuity of two thousand dollars a year!

CHAPTER XVII.

TWO GIRLS.

"The ruby is not more full of fire
Nor the sun more full of light
Than my soul is full of the wildest love
For you—for you—to-night!"

With a desperate effort Oriole steadied her reeling brain. Her feet trembled as she ran, but she must pursue those two figures disappearing along the garden alley, on either side of which arose tall stalks of tube-roses sending out a sumptuous sweetness to meet them as they passed. When she overtook them they were quite near the house. Two long windows of the drawing-room were open on the terrace, from which broad bars of light streamed out over the walk beneath. Irene was exactly in the center of one of these golden gleams when the steward's daughter reached out a little hot hand and touched hers.

"Miss St. Mark, stop a moment! I have something to tell you."

Irene paused in surprise. When she saw who it was a slight flush went over her proud face and she recoiled as if the burning touch of those small fingers was distasteful to her.

"Something to tell me?" she repeated, haughtily.

The white fleecy wrap had fallen from her fair and stately shoulders; in the golden lamplight she looked coldly perfect—delicately beautiful—as Oriole felt, with a sort of despair.

"How can he refuse her?" she thought, pausing and hesitating in her singular mission, shrinking from so much freezing splendor, trembling to think of its effect on him she loved. "He never can refuse to make her his wife, if she asks him," she felt, with a sudden despair. "But she does not love him—I will try to save him."

"What can you possibly have to say to my daughter?" queried Mrs. St. Mark, seeing the girl stammer and shrink.

"I am in haste—in great haste," added Irene.

"Yes, I know," began Oriole, and now the fire leaped up in her great dark eyes and the color came like a flame to her white cheeks. "You are in haste to reach the death-chamber, to persuade Mr. Morley to marry you before he dies; so that you may, as his widow, inherit a fortune."

"Impertinent—and an eavesdropper!"

"I know—I know. I was in the summer-house waiting to hear—how he was to-night. It happened. I wonder—would it be a kindness to you, before you carry out your provident plan, Miss St. Mark, to inform you that the will of the late Mrs. Morley has been found—the missing will—in which she, naturally, leaves her own property to her own child, Felix Gathorne—that Eugene Morley does not own one acre of this greatly estate, one stone in this great house, one share in any mine, one dollar in any bank, except his brother—no brother by blood—chooses to give him something out of charity? Mrs. Gathorne owned everything before she became

Mrs. Morley, and left it to her son, a Gathorne, as all knew she must have done; although her villainous second husband forged a will which has passed in place of the true. Now, the true, the legal will has come to light."

"It is strange that you should be the person to bring me this news! You must excuse me if I fail to believe it," but Irene, affecting to scorn the unexpected communication, yet turned very pale and her voice was not firm.

"Believe it or not, you will be compelled to believe it before long. Eugene Morley is but a poor dependent on his adopted brother's bounty. The jewels, and the miniature from which my dress was modeled, the night of the ball, came from the same source as the missing will. I have positive knowledge of what I am talking about. I thought I would tell you—that you—that you—might know what you were doing before the words were spoken which make you Mr. Morley's wife. Of course, if you love him as a wife should, this will make no difference with your plans. If he—lives, Mr. Gathorne will doubtless be generous; if he—dies—" oh, how the soft young voice fluttered over that cruel word!—"he may be more generous still. I only tell you what I know."

Irene, pale and frowning, pulled to pieces a rose she held in her hand.

"I give not the slightest credit to anything you tell me," she said, after a moment or two.

"I do not understand your motive—and I cannot think you are honest. The whole house is aware of your scandalous, indelicate encouragement of Mr. Morley's idle flirtation with you—his gardener's daughter. I might have quarreled with him about it, only I did not consider the subject worth a quarrel. Of course, he is a young man, and will flirt if invited. When we are married I shall have something to say about such matters. I tell you now I think you are trying deliberately to deceive me to prevent my marrying him to-night. Come, mother, we are wasting precious time," and she walked on quickly, ascended the stone steps and had reached the hall door when Oriole overtook her.

"It may be a sin for me to love him," panted the steward's daughter, "but my love is pure and true. I would die for him—ah, Heaven! how gladly would I die for him this night if I could take his place! Oh, that God would let me give my life for his! Why cannot it be? Yes, I love him too well to wish to see you coldly, inhumanly plotting to be his wife that, as his widow, you may luxuriate in his fortune! Oh, I thank Heaven, he is poor—as poor as I am!—since that will prevent your caring to secure him. Yes, Miss St. Mark, Mr. Gathorne is the heir—will have the money—try your arts on him! Win him and his wealth, and let my poor Eugene alone! Oh, he loves me as he never loved you! I am going to him. If he dies to-night I will die, also; I will kill myself, that I may go with him!" Her eyes glittered, a strange smile dimpled the sweetest mouth that ever breathed; the thought that she was so near Eugene and that he might be dying was making her almost mad.

"Little fool!" muttered Irene, angrily. "How she raves! Serves him right for paying her any attention. These low-bred women never know their places. She must be prevented from entering his room; the excitement would be dangerous to him. I must call a servant to take her away. Dapple! Where is Dapple?"

"Ere, ma'am," responded that person, promptly, from the chair in the hall where he was comfortably dozing.

"See to this girl, will you?—take her home. She insists on seeing your master, against the physician's orders."

"Miss Oriole, I wouldn't, if I was you," expostulated Dapple, hesitating to lay a detaining hand on Zophiel Darien's daughter. "They say master is very critical to-night; you wouldn't do anything as would 'arm 'im, would you, my dear?"

But Oriole had fled past him swifter than a summer tempest and had rushed up the great staircase so blindly that, with a shock, she came in contact with some one on the landing, who put out a hand, firm but kind, and held her, panting.

"Mr. Gathorne, let me go! They say he is dying. I must be with him—I know he will want me and I must be with him. Oh, if you love me, as you have often said, be pitiful and let me see him! Think! is this an hour to keep us apart?"

"Poor child! Listen. I speak to you as a brother would. The doctor is in Eugene's room—and Mr. Hermitage. You must not make yourself an object of wonder and curiosity to others. Besides, I have good news for you, my

poor child—Eugene is better! His fever is down a degree in the last hour. He is sleeping restfully; and the doctor now feels quite sure that he has nothing to do but get well. Is not this enough to send you home quite happy, Oriole?" He still held the hand he had caught to detain her, looking wistfully into her face, thinking if only it had been their fate that she should have loved him as she loved Eugene, how fair their lot might have been; he felt the thrill which ran through her to her finger-tips, and the next moment she sunk into his arms, her head on his shoulder—the sudden change from despair had been too much for her already overwrought mood and she had fainted.

Of all things Felix desired to avoid attracting attention to the wayward girl, so he carried her into his own room, dashed some water over her face and called Miss Wormely's maid.

Mrs. Chaldecott waited a full hour in the summer-house, in great anxiety as to her impulsive charge, before Oriole returned there, pale and weak, leaning on Mr. Gathorne's arm.

"I have been ill," she said, in an animated voice, "ill from too much joy! He is better—he is going to live! And now, promise me, Mr. Gathorne, that he shall not be worried by a visit from Miss St. Mark to-night. I have a reason for asking it—a good reason."

"She shall not see him. As I said, he is sleeping; and I shall insist on the ladies at once retiring and the house being kept very quiet. So now, good-night. Are you sure you are able to walk so far, Miss Darien?" anxiously.

"I am able to do anything, now," she answered, exultingly—he felt how her eyes were glowing in the dark. "Come, Mrs. Chaldecott, I am ready."

"Good-night, Mr. Gathorne," said Esther, and there was an under-thrill of tenderness in the way she spoke the formal phrase. "I am as glad as you are that Mr. Morley is going to live. You are a noble friend to him—I must say it. Some young men, situated as you are, would have been disappointed at this good news."

"My dear madam, can you imagine me so covetous—so wicked—as to have looked forward to my own gain through this terrible trouble?"

"No, no. I know you too well. Happily, so stern a minister as Death will not be needed to secure you the rights of which you were basely defrauded. A few days—a few weeks, at most—and there will be a great change at Morley Beeches."

"I do not understand you, madam."

"Of course not. My words are but the dim shadow of coming events. Again, good-night, my dear boy."

Her voice trembled. She seems really very fond of me—I dare say because she was my mother's friend. It must be that she believes she has some clue to my mother's will—perhaps her will—which she can make serviceable to me. Very well; so be it. It has been very hard and bitter for me to see a Morley in my place; and I would be more than human not to be eager to get back my own; though I love Eugene as a brother, and have tried not to envy him."

Full of wonder at what might be in store for himself—happy at thought of Eugene's prospect of recovery—he walked quickly back to the house, after seeing the two ladies as far as the stile.

It was midnight by this time; the lights were nearly all out in the lower part of the house; every one had retired but the watchers in the sick-room—no, not every one, for there was the tall, slim figure of Miss St. Mark pacing up and down the piazza. She stopped and waited for him as he came up the steps; then she laid her hand lightly on his arm, saying, in her lowest, sweetest tones:

"I cannot sleep to-night. Will you walk with me a little while?"

"You know that Eugene is out of danger?" he asked.

"Yes. Mr. Hermitage was kind enough to come to me with the good news. Of course I am very glad and happy."

The odor of violets floated out of her light draperies as she walked; her face was strangely fair in the clear starlight; she clung to his arm more closely than was necessary, keeping silent for a time; then she began, very softly and tremulously:

"I want to ask your pardon, Felix, for the cruel, unjustifiable suspicions I entertained when Eugene was brought home, wounded. I wonder you do not hate me—do not refuse to have anything to do with me; if I were in your place I never could forgive or forget. But, you are made of finer clay than I am. In your in-

nocence of evil intent, in your manliness and uprightness, you can afford to overlook the passing accusations of a half-maddened girl—maddened with fright and grief, as I was when I thought that dark thing of you. Say that you forgive me, Felix! I could not go to my pillow until I had striven to gain from your lips the assurance that I was pardoned."

"This, from the proud Irene, was a great deal! Her perfumed handkerchief was pressed to her eyes—how could a man know there were no tears in those blue eyes, and that the faltering of the low voice was purest art?"

Felix had never much liked Miss St. Mark; had thought her selfish and worldly, a keen huntress after a brilliant *parti*, a young lady who prized fashion above feeling; he had wondered if Eugene had no more heart than his fair *fiancée*, and if they could be happy together. Now he felt remorse for these fears; believed that he had done injustice to Irene; that she had more sensibility than he had given her credit for. She looked up at him so humbly, her slim hand trembled on his arm, she was so very, very fair and charming!

"I easily forgive you," he answered her. "Suspicion had to fall somewhere—why not on the party seemingly having most to gain? Do not speak of it again, Irene!—let the 'dead past bury its dead.'"

"You are so generous!" she smiled. "I believe I am only just beginning to understand you, Felix. I have always been a little afraid of you, you seemed so serious, so much more intellectual—to look down on our little follies. We must be better friends, hereafter—shall we not? Good-night, friend Felix, and pleasant dreams! I am sure mine will be bright," and the little hand slipped away from his arm, and Irene, like some fair vision, vanished into night—having spun the first threads of the new web for the 'ew fly she might wish to entangle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WILL SHE PLAY HIM FALSE?

And the same wind sung and the same waves whitened,

Or over the garden's last petals were shed,
In the lips that had whispered, the eyes that had lightened,
Love was dead.

—SWINBURNE.

It was a somber afternoon early in October; not raining, or threatening rain, but with some cold clouds piled up around the horizon, and the crisp air just chilly enough to make the great, fragrant fire of maple wood on the hearth of the library at Morley Beeches delightful. The room looked twice as inviting with that generous fire. The light played gayly over the gilt lettering of the books, over the dark, old-fashioned round mahogany table, over the marble busts, the fine engravings, the rich crimson of the velvet curtains looped far back to let in what sunlight was abroad. An easy-chair was wheeled up in front of the hearth, and in it—a trifle languid, a trifle pale, but ten times handsomer, if possible, than ever—lounged Eugene.

This was his first visit down-stairs since his accident—as he had persisted in calling it ever since he had spoken on the subject at all. Miss Wormely, Felix, Mrs. St. Mark and the principal servants had assisted on the important occasion; and now having seen the interesting invalid most comfortably and satisfactorily established, had vanished about their separate affairs.

Irene, dressed for dinner, was walking up and down the room, a little impatiently, with something almost like a frown on her proud face.

"This is tiresome for you, I know, Irene," said Eugene, looking up at her pleasantly as she passed and repossessed him. "I don't see what all my friends took themselves off for, when they were most needed."

"It would have been intrusive for them to have remained, when you were so ill. The Misses Carlington are having a fine time at home now."

"Fifth Avenue certainly is more brilliant at this season than Morley Beeches. I am sorry you find it dull, dear."

"It is not the dullness I was thinking of so much, Eugene. I was thinking of the proprieties. Now that you are able to be about and all your other guests have flown it would look better for mother and I to follow. I have told her so; the maid is now packing our trunks; we shall get off to-morrow. How soon do you think you will come to the city?"

She did not look at him as she asked the question but stopped by one of the windows and kept her face turned as if interested in the soft down-fluttering of yellow leaves on the lawn outside.

"In a fortnight, I hope. Is it quite kind of

you, Irene, to leave me here with only my aunt and Felix?"

"And the gardener's daughter," she added, with a low laugh.

Eugene bit his lips and his pale face flushed.

"You do well to remind me of her," he said, rather haughtily. "I may be compelled to seek her society out of pure loneliness. Not my gardener's daughter, however, as you must know. Zophiel Darien is as proud a man as there is going; and that little beauty, his daughter, is a princess of the blood royal; her grandfather was King of the Gipsies, and their blood is as pure as that of most of our aristocracies. She has education and accomplishments. Did you ever hear her sing?"

"I have not had that honor," and Irene burst into a sparkling laugh, not at all ill-natured. "I am glad to learn that the *mésalliance* will not be so striking, after all!"

"Irene, what is the matter with you, nowadays? You are curiously changed."

"Perhaps you think I am ignorant of how your accident occurred?" she answered him, still watching the falling leaves outside. "There are a good many girls who would be 'curiously changed' by learning that the man they were engaged to marry had been the hero of such an adventure."

For a moment the handsome Eugene looked disconcerted; this proud girl at the window, with her face turned from him, certainly had cause of complaint against him. He liked her better for feeling his misconduct.

"I have been guilty of a little foolish side-flirtation," he said, with a blush, "I acknowledge it. Nothing serious—nothing wicked—"

"Only breaking her heart and mine," interposed Irene, calmly.

"Good Heaven! How gravely you take it! I am awfully sorry—awfully! When you are my wife, dearest, there will be no fear of such delinquencies on my part. I will try to be a model husband. I will—truly!" he added, earnestly, feeling in his soul that he had been a scamp without meaning to be.

"When I am your wife!" repeated Irene, turning slowly and fixing her calm blue eyes on his at last. "When do you think that will be?"

"Why do you wish to break with me?" faltered Eugene.

"I should be justified in such a step, Eugene," she said, after a pause.

And then she began to walk up and down again with quickened steps.

"You pain me inexpressibly," he said. "You agitate me. I did not dream—"

"Then say no more. You are not yet strong enough to bear agitation. I did not mean to bring up this subject just yet. Hush! you must not talk! The doctor will scold me. I am going up stairs, and then you will have only the fire to talk to," and she ran out of the room.

She had succeeded in bringing affairs to the very point she desired. She had thrown all the blame on her lover. She appeared as the injured party. Should she desire to break the engagement he would set down her motive to injured feeling—wounded love!

To utterly break with him—or not—was the puzzle which had occupied her mind for the last two weeks. Before the time came to decide she had expected to gain some positive confirmation of Oriole's statement about the property. Impressed with the belief that the girl spoke truth she had been playing her cards to interest and enchant the grave dark young man she had once treated with almost contempt.

If she could find out for herself—before either of the brothers knew—or suspected she knew—which was the sure inheritor, then she would know how to end the play. To confess to Felix that Eugene's conduct had destroyed her love; to allow him to perceive that she was conscious of having made a mistake—that, after all, it was the poor Felix and not the rich heir she loved—to work out all this before Felix learned the change in his prospects—this was her intention, the aim of her conduct since that night when Oriole declared to her, in the garden, the truth about the missing will.

But the day had nearly come when she must depart from Morley Beeches and the doubt yet remained. Once away, where would be the opportunity for making discoveries?

"If I could see that girl again!" she thought, as she left the library. Looking up at the tall clock slowly ticking away the hours in its niche in the hall she saw that it was but four o'clock. "Plenty of time for a stroll," she said, and throwing over her head a fleecy scarlet "cloud" which lay at hand, she slipped out and went into the shrubberies, from whence by devious paths, not observable from the windows of the

mansion, she made her way to the Lodge. She found it closed and little Betty sitting forlornly on the steps watching the gate. She sat down beside her, saying that she was tired, and taking out her purse gave the child a gold dollar.

"For a keepsake, Betty. I am going away to-morrow."

"Be you?" queried the little maid, grasping the coin eagerly. "I won't have no gates to open no more to the fine carriages. 'Twill be dre'dful lonesome here all winter, I s'pect."

"Is Miss Darien at home, Betty?"

"She don't live here now, ma'am."

"Why, how long has she been away?"

"A good while—weeks. She an' Miss Chaldecott they went away. I guess it was about the time young master got shotted."

"Where is Mr. Darien?"

"Oh, he's gone, too—just for to-day. He's gone to some other place. I don't s'pect him back till after the ten train."

"And you are here all alone, little Betty?"

"Yes'm. I don't mind it. But I s'pect I'll be dre'dful frightened when it gets night. He said, if I was afraid, to lock up an' go an' stay to the big house, in the kitchen, till he came."

Irene looked musingly off over the velvety lawn between the larches and weeping-elms; a slight flush rose in her face.

"You had better go to the house, as Darien suggested, little Betty. You are too small to remain here alone after dark. You must be careful to lock up the Lodge, though; so things will be safe."

"Oh, yes'm. I fasten the kitchen door on the inside; then I come out this door and lock it with the big brass key, and then I hide the key here, under this stone," added the child, with the important air of a housekeeper. "He allers knows where to look for it. This has been the place to hide it from times immemorial, Miss Oriole says. It's a snug place, ain't it, Miss?"

"It is, indeed," said Irene, and even before the innocent eyes of the child her own fell, at the wicked resolve which came in her mind. "Well, Betty," she said, after a moment, "promise me to go up to the house to-night, or I shall feel uneasy about you. The cook will give you some of the dessert—I will ask her to. And be a good girl this winter and when I return here next spring I will bring you a white frock and a little gold locket."

After that she arose from the step of the Lodge where she had sat beside Betty, and turning as she walked away, said, smilingly:

"Be sure to put the key under the stone and to ask cook for a piece of the iced-pudding"—leaving the little girl looking after her with big, delighted eyes.

Irene could not return to the house immediately—her heart beat too loudly and it seemed to her that her face must betray the thoughts that crowded into her mind. She had never committed a crime. She had told white lies, had used all sorts of worldly artifice, been guilty of the little peccadilloes of a selfish, artful girl—now, the temptation to search that vacant Lodge for some trace of the truth of what Miss Darien had told her, assailed her.

Was it not probable the girl's father—long the steward of Morley Beeches—had possession of the will?—perhaps of the jewels? What harm would there be in just looking? She strayed about the grounds, dallying with temptation, until the sun set behind battlements of beetling clouds that promised a very dark night.

Meantime, Eugene, left to the firelit, sleepy, warm solitude of the library, leaned back in his easy-chair—his blonde curls shining against the rich red velvet—and mused upon the little scene which had just transpired between him and his *fiancée*. He was surprised at the feeling she had shown—and touched. Somehow, he had felt that Irene was very worldly, and that she would hardly break her heart over his little love affairs, provided she was lady of Morley Beeches, with a host of visitors, a retinue of servants, horses and carriages at command, and money for unlimited extravagance in dress. He had thought of her as a wife to be proud of—to uphold the dignity of the house—to wear his diamonds and preside at his table. He had admired her exceedingly; for Eugene, too, was worldly and fond of display.

The altogether novel and unexpected sentiment which had sprung up in his breast after his acquaintance with Oriole had been a great surprise to him. At first he had only meant to make himself agreeable to a very, very pretty little rustic. Against his wish, against his will, he had been swept off his feet by the rush of a passion, new, sweet, strange, infatigable. Oriole's love had been a revelation to him. Its in-

nocence, its abandonment had bewitched him—its depth, its fire had stirred his better and deeper nature. He had struggled against this charm not only because he was engaged to Miss St. Mark—a good deal, too, because Oriole, with all her wonderful beauty and spirit, was only his steward's daughter. Whenever he met her, her power over him was irresistible; when away from her, Irene was still to him the proud, high-bred lady whose loveliness best suited him.

Eugene Morley was not the first man thus dallying between two loves, and moderately sincere—at least not willfully deceitful—with both.

Leaning back in his invalid's chair this somber afternoon, quite perturbed by Irene's question—"Why should I not break off with you?"—a sudden delicious throb of joy such as he had never before felt stirred his heart. He, too, had asked himself a question:

"Supposing my lady breaks with me, will I not then be utterly free to ask Oriole to be my wife? Oh, my bird Oriole! What divine happiness—what sweetness of delight! To take you in my arms and tell you that you are to be all my own! If Irene discards me what is there to hinder? Only my own pride. I shall not be such a fool as to cast away that fond love of my little girl's because she brings me no dower but her own glorious beauty and truth. I have no stern father—no haughty lady mother to chill her with their cold criticism. We can be happy as angels here. Why not?"

It was with an impatient sigh that he came back to reality from the bright dreams he had painted in the glowing coals—came back, at the sound of Mrs. St. Mark's voice asking him how he felt, to remember that Irene had not yet given him his freedom—perhaps did not mean to. He shivered a little as he heard madame's voice, and answered that he was tired—if Felix and Dapple would lend him their arms he would go back to his own room.

"Why cannot we do what we like best, Felix, in this free world?" he asked, fretfully, as his brother assisted him up the stairs.

CHAPTER XIX.

THWARTED, YET SUCCESSFUL.

Would fain have wrought upon his cloudy mood
With reverent eyes, mock-loyal, shaken voice
And fluttered adoration, and at last
With dark sweet hints of some who prized him more
Than who should prize him most. —TENNYSON.

THE little maid Betty was stuffing herself with iced pudding in the great kitchen of the mansion, and listening, with awe and delight, to the gossip of half a dozen servants, who, now that dinner had been served, all but the coffee, had leisure to breathe—consequently, to pass remarks upon their "betters" up-stairs. It was very nice to be there instead of shivering alone in the little kitchen of the Lodge; she had performed her duties for the day, and her conscience was light as she thought of the bolted shutters, and the key lying snugly in its hiding-place.

The dinner had been rather a dull affair—not a guest to enliven it. Miss Wormely was seldom brilliant, though always good; Mrs. St. Mark was tired with the labor of superintending the packing; Mr. Gathorne appeared lost in his own reflections; Irene, however, looked unusually handsome, with a pink spot in either cheek, and the fire of suppressed excitement glowing under her eyelashes; she was the only one who talked much, chattering away about "airy nothings," as if challenging the admiration of Felix. Nevertheless, she ate little, and excused herself abruptly from dessert.

"Don't expect me in the drawing room for some little time, Miss Wormely," she said, as she left the table. "I have one or two matters to look after, if we leave to-morrow."

"I wonder what!" observed Mrs. St. Mark, as her daughter disappeared. "Everything is done. I do believe it is only an excuse to go and sit with Eugene awhile. She is so devoted to him—and, I dare say, a fortnight seems an age of separation to them."

So Felix, believing Irene to be with the convalescent, did not go to his brother's sitting-room, as usual, after dinner; but went into the library and solaced himself with the new magazines, leaving the two ladies to their own chit-chat in the drawing-room.

Irene, as we may guess, was not devoting herself to the invalid, nor anywhere in the great house. She had thrown a dark mantle over her light evening dress, taken a handful of matches from a box on the billiard room chimney-piece, and stolen out into the cloudy night on an errand she was ashamed to think of, yet none the less determined on.

Down the carriage-drive she ran, hardly able to see a step before her, and soon the white hand, glistening with its solitaire engagement-ring, groped under the stone for the key little Betty had so artlessly betrayed to the lady: the front door of the Lodge opened at its touch; she crept in, closed and locked it behind her, and then, with fast-beating, guilty heart, struck a match and looked about for the lamp, which she knew she would find on the table of the modest parlor.

The closed shutters would keep in the light; she drew down the inside blinds and felt quite safe. She cast a curious glance about the humble nest of the Oriole—at the cottage piano covered with classic music, and French and Italian songs.

"Upon my word! As Eugene says, she is no barbarian! My own task is not more severe. These furnishings are good in their way, too. How sweet the room is with roses! Well, if he is not the heir, I don't see how he can do better than to try love in a cottage with that beautiful creature! It would be intensely romantic, no doubt. Only it would not suit me! However, there is no time to lose. I must about my search."

Zophiel Darien's desk stood in a corner. It was not locked.

"Nothing important here," she said, as the cover yielded to her hand. "Else it would be under lock and key." She spent perhaps twenty minutes taking out and glancing at the carefully arranged papers in the pigeon-hole—accounts, nearly all of them, of his stewardship.

"Nothing—nothing at all!" she exclaimed, in deep disgust. "Come! we must see her room! It was the front chamber. I remember that day we passed it when she leaned in the window, making a picture of herself. So artless! so innocent!"

She took up the lamp and found her way up the closed staircase to that pretty "bower-chamber," where so many hours of Oriole's pure young life had been passed. Hanging the thick mantle from her shoulders over the window, she looked eagerly about. Every drawer of the bureau, every box on the pretty tables, were swiftly opened and examined.

Then the cupboard in the chimney caught her eye. At last here was something that was fastened! She had brought with her a large bunch of keys of her own trunks, boxes, and so forth, which she now hastily tried, one after another.

"Good luck!" she cried, as one of these turned the lock. "Now, let us see whether or not we have come on a fool's errand! Ah! What is this rusty, worm-eaten, mysterious box? Can it be?"

In a moment the lamp and the box were on the floor and Irene St. Mark, the proud, the high-bred, the stainless, was down on her knees beside them. How her blue eyes glittered, how her cheeks burned, how her breath panted, as the jewels Oriole had worn the night of the ball, were revealed to her eager search. There was the lovely miniature, with the dress of rare brocade which the girl had copied. And here were papers!—papers yellow with age, rustling with strange importance like the footsteps of ghosts that bring messages from the dead.

Irene was pale with intense expectation as she opened the first document her fingers touched:

"THE WILL OF ALICE GATHORNE MORLEY."

It was brief, covering but a single page of foolscap; but it was clear and explicit, and the date was the day of the lady's death, as stated by the two witnesses whose signatures were attached—that of the lawyer who drew up the will and of Diana Randolph, her maid.

Irene's eyes swiftly devoured the words which gave to Felix Gathorne the whole large estate of Gathorne Court, with moneys in bank, mining and railroad stock, and numberless lots of land in St. Louis and Chicago—property that seemed of even greater value than she had anticipated, the enumeration of which aroused in her avaricious mind a keen greed. As soon as her gaze had drunk in those golden words, she deliberately conveyed the paper to a safe hiding-place over her own throbbing heart. She was now anxious to get away. Without delaying to read them she placed the other papers in her pocket, tumbled the glowing diamonds and emeralds back into the box, with the guineas and the miniature, closed it, returned it to the cupboard, locked the door and removed the key.

Not for worlds would she have abstracted one of those jewels, though she found it hard to tear her eyes from their fascinations.

"I am no thief," she said to herself. "It is right for me to take these papers to restore them

to their owner. Certainly I have a better right to them than that girl can have! How did she come by them? Is this 'honest Darien' in league with Eugene to defraud his brother? Or, rather, was he in league with old Mathew Morley and did he bind himself to keep the secret from both the young men? This seems more probable; I hardly believe Eugene would knowingly rob another of his fortune. He is thoughtless—a little selfish—but not base. Oh, no wonder, this paragon of innocence, this artless steward's daughter would like to catch Mr. Morley! They would keep things in the family, strictly! She would wear these diamonds with an air! If I have the good luck which has so far been mine, I will thwart their little expectations. It was a happy thought, my coming here to-night! Little Betty, you shall have your gold locket for the innocent way in which you taught me where to look for the key!"

In five minutes more the lamp was extinguished, the Lodge empty and the house-key back in its place under the stone. Zophiel Darien would find it when he came; and, as we know he was ignorant of the treasure-trove his daughter had concealed in her own room, he would also remain ignorant of the robbery.

Irene crept back through the darkness to the great house. She was pale and agitated with triumph—not with a sense of guilt.

The silk curtains were heavy over the windows of the drawing-room but those of the library were still undrawn, and a stream of light came out of them. Irene stole up close and looked in.

"The fire in the library
Dies out; through the open doors
The red, empty room you may see."

Empty, but for the one still, drooping figure by the round-table, from whose hand the book has dropped, and who is staring into the fading fire.

"Our dark Felix looks melancholy," thought the beautiful girl who observed him from the dim, dewy lawn outside. "He is too apt to be melancholy. I wonder if my charms have power to cure him of that 'infirmity of noble minds.' Would those dark eyes shine with sudden smiles did he know what Irene carries in her bosom for him? Ah, what a tricky Puck is fortune! It was the golden-haired Eugene a few hours ago—now, it is the dusky Felix. Come, Felix, it is written that you are to be my master! You do not dream of it, do you, sitting there, brooding over your poverty? Now, then, 'bubble, bubble' spells of the sorceress! See if you can blind those too-searching eyes—convince that too-skeptic mind that Irene loves him for himself alone!" and laughing at her own view of the matter, armed with her sweetest looks, Irene stole over the porch, through the hall, into the library, and laid her white hand lightly over the dark eyes of Felix, crying gayly:

"Look no more into the coals, somber dreamer! Here is a lady who demands the service of those eyes! There is not a soul in this great dull house to speak to one!" Then, dropping her mock-merry air, and assuming a look of pathetic sadness, she murmured, as she sunk into a chair opposite to Felix's at the table, and drooped her graceful head in her hand: "If I only dared to make you my confidant, Felix!—to tell you how unhappy I am!"

"You, unhappy, now that Eugene is so nearly well!"

Her eyes fell and she heaved a long, tremulous sigh.

"What is the matter? Have you had bad news?"

The poor relation was no adept in the art of flirting; he could not guess that the haughty Miss St. Mark was condescending to make a "dead set" at him—how could he, being unaware of her leading motive? He looked at her with innocent concern as he questioned her.

"How stupid you are," she cried, frowning, but flashing at him a charming smile. "I have had no bad news; my troubles are those of the imagination! Supposing a girl, not thoroughly knowing her own heart, should engage herself to a young gentleman, dazzled by his wealth and position and his bright looks and sunny temper, knowing that she did not love him as a woman loves but once, but believing she could live happily with him, nevertheless—supposing such a girl afterward discovers that she has made a dreadful mistake, for she meets the man who should be her other better higher self—meets him and loves him to distraction," murmured Irene, in a low, passionate voice, leaning toward her companion, with sudden tears in the blue eyes, and then allowing the lashes to droop, the cheeks to pale, the breath to quicken.

Who could longer misunderstand her!

Not even Felix, guiltless as he was of any intricate knowledge of woman's subtlety.

His first feeling was that of astonishment. Irene St. Mark in love with him—the poor relation! Why, she had scarcely treated him with common civility. He gazed at her in surprise as she sat with lowered lids and palpitating breath so near him that he could hear the beating of her heart. She was very fair, faultlessly fair, with all the fascination of a beautiful woman who flatters a man with the half-told story that he is dear to her. The halo-trope in her golden hair was no sweeter than her breath, as she sighed softly. It may be that if Felix had not already given his heart away he might have been blinded by this dazzling flattery; and have made warm love in return. For an instant his pulse bounded and the color rose in his face; the next he laughed out, merrily, as if the whole pretty scene were a farce, and quoted wickedly from "Lady Clara Vere de Vere."

"Oh, your sweet eyes, your low replies! A great enchantress you may be."

You know the rest, Irene! Don't seek to entangle the 'foolish yeoman' to his ruin! I am averse to committing suicide! I suppose you like to keep your hand in at flirtation; you do it magnificently!—but, unfortunately, I am not impressible. However, I will promise not to talk Eugene."

How handsome the grave, dark young face looked, lighted up by the flash of mischief in the eyes! Irene was foiled. She bit her lips with mortification; but she, too, made an effort to laugh off her failure. She clapped her white hands together.

"I had a wager with somebody—I won't tell you who!—that I could strike the vein of romance in your gloomy nature, Sir Felix, but I have lost the gloves. I own up that you are adamant."

"I will pay for the gloves," answered Felix, good-humoredly. "I thought it was too good to be true, mademoiselle."

"Oh, you condescend to a compliment! Incredible! I did not believe we could bring you to one. Well, shall we have a game of chess to decide who pays for the gloves? It is stupid enough here to drive one even to chess."

They played a single game; and so well did Irene carry out the suggestion that her little drama had been intended for comedy that even her companion was in doubt.

"There, checkmate to your king! I will send you the bill, Mr. Gathorne. And now, I must finish my preparations for departure from this Castle of Dullness, where you propose to immure yourself for the winter, I believe?"

"Yes. I like it here well enough to remain for some time."

"Ah, I understand! And I wish you every success, Felix! If you can beguile the gardener's daughter to forget my Eugene I shall be much obliged to you, I am sure! Good-night and good luck."

With a ravishing smile, kissing the tips of her fingers at him, as he politely came to the library door; Irene ran lightly up the stairs; when she was out of hearing she said, "Fool!" with a good deal of energy; when she had shut herself in her own room and locked the door she repeated:

"Fool! You have spoiled your only chance! Why did I not think of this at first? Of the two Eugene is far more to my mind! Eugene it shall be—and Eugene shall still be the heir of Morley!"

So saying, she took the stolen papers from her room, and burned them, one by one, in the flame of the lamp.

"There is no clew," she said to herself, with a laugh. "She will never know who did it."

CHAPTER XX.

PANDORA'S BOX.

"Play me no tricks," said Lord Ronald,

"For I am yours in word and deed."

"Play me no tricks," said Lord Ronald,

"Your riddle is hard to read."—TENNYSON.

"You have been terribly cruel to me, Mr. Morley."

"Don't say that, Oriole! It is hard enough to part without that!"

"Why did you tell me about love—make me believe you loved me? You knew that you were going on to marry Miss St. Mark—that I was no suitable mate for you, even if you had not been engaged—knew all the time, that I was never to be your wife—that I was only to amuse you for a few idle hours, when all Morley Beeches, with its proud ladies and its plans of pleasure, were tedious to you. You made me love you. You looked into my eyes—you drew

my soul out through them; you bound me to you, your very slave—your idolater! You knew what you were doing. You sinned deliberately. I was but a child, an ignorant, innocent child, who trusted you as she trusted her father and her God."

"A divine child, Oriole!—the sweetest, the dearest, that ever charmed and surprised a man out of all prudence—all cold, worldly calculation."

"It seems you calculate still with quite the old worldliness," interrupted the girl, bitterly. "Oriole Darien is good enough to afford you amusement—she is not good enough to be your wife—that is the whole matter."

They were seated in the old summer-house. It was a warm, hazy Indian summer afternoon, when the blue sky is changed to a soft opaline hue by the perfumed smoke that hangs in the air. The scarlet glory of the Virginia creeper that completely covered an old and crumbled thorn apple tree not far away had dropped leaf by leaf, like flakes of fire; but the honeysuckle was still green over the little summer-house and the garden was bright in places with artemisias. It was the last day of October; tomorrow Eugene Morley, quite recovered from his frightful accident, was to quit the Beeches for the gay city life which awaited him; two months of pleasant sojourning near his fiancée; then a brilliant wedding, a trip and a stay of several weeks down South; a leisurely return, and a home-coming late in the spring.

The sound of hammers and of men whistling at their work came from the great house, where repairs had already begun the day after the departure of the St. Marks. To-morrow the young master would be off. The news had reached the two ladies in their woodland cottage; though, indeed, they had known it all along.

There had been a change at the Lodge, too. Zophiel Darien had given warning to Mr. Morley to look for another steward; and Felix Gathorne had applied for the situation.

"It will add another thousand to my poor two thousand," he had said, laughingly, "and I shall like the work better than being a lawyer. Let me try it a year, at all events!" and Eugene, secretly glad to be saved the worry of taking a stranger, after some little remonstrance, yielded to his brother's urgent request. Darien was not to give up the Lodge until the tenth, when the fifteenth year of his faithful service expired; but he was away part of the time looking for a place which would suit him. His daughter, he had resolved, should go to school for two years.

"It will give her time to get over the shock, and learn to forgive me," he had said to himself. "It will be best for all of us," and he had sighed heavily—he and his little girl had been very, very happy all those years in the Lodge until the master had come home and spoiled all their peace of mind.

Oriole had come from the cottage and passed through the garden, hoping for a glimpse of Mr. Morley. Her father was away; had he not been it would have made no difference; she must say good-by to her lover—must indulge in the dear wretchedness—the bitter, stolen bliss of a few moments in his society. Mrs. Chaldecott had talked with her so often about Eugene—had explained to her why her father had felt so angry with him—that Oriole was not quite the ignorant, trusting child she had been at their last meeting. She loved Eugene as wholly as ever; but down in her passionate heart stirred a womanly feeling of resentment at his inexcusable selfishness in deliberately winning her love, knowing that it could only end in sorrow for her.

"She is good enough to afford you amusement; she is not good enough to be your wife."

The words sounded bitter falling from those flower-soft lips. Were they not true? Eugene knew that they were. Yet—he had not meant it! The temptation had, every time, been equally sudden and powerful. Away from Oriole he could not calmly resolve to quarrel with the proud girl he had asked to marry him; it would be a dastardly thing to throw Miss St. Mark "overboard," as the expression goes.

The only really manly thing to have done would have been to have always let Oriole alone—never won her with those soft, dazzling looks, those words spoken in tender tones which gave them double power—never sought her out in the garden, or by the lake, with his gracious attentions—never told her of his admiration. He had proven too weak to resist so fascinating an inclination.

And—whenever he did come where the girl was—he fell instantly madly in love with her—

swore to himself that the world and his fiancée were well lost for such a prize—that this was love, pure and glorious—a passion he should be proud to feel—a happiness that made every other emotion tame and dull. And so—while he was with her, he yielded to the delight, the witchery of her beauty, the sweet madness of a fascination which sprung from real sympathy of two young, fond hearts looking out of young, fond eyes.

He never meant to harm a hair of that glorious head—to bring sorrow to that glad, innocent nature; he only gave way to the instinct of happiness in her company, shared with the sky and trees, the flowers and bees and birds. They had been divinely happy in those brief meetings. Alas, that he should have been so thoughtless of her as to allow it! He was ashamed and sorry. More, he was miserable. He loved Oriole with a better love than he could ever give another woman. He would be proud of his wife, but—oh, the sweetness of a companionship like this, could it last forever! His fancy pictured Oriole, richly dressed in the satins and brocades and jewels he should give her, flitting about his grand home, a lady and yet a sweet, fond child, who adored him—who clung to him—who lived but in his smile!—a creature, beautiful as a dream of houries, confiding, fond—his own dear little bride!

"It is hard to have you say such things to me," he said, humbly; then, with a groan:

"I tell you, Oriole, truly, were I free, I would have you for my own sweet wife to-morrow. But it would be a disgrace to me to break with Miss St. Mark now. You and I must be wretched all our lives, I suppose."

"She does not love you. Why should we be wretched when she is only after your money? Were Felix Gathorne master of this place—could he suddenly become the heir—do you think Miss St. Mark would marry you?"

"I have never thought of it in that light," answered Eugene, coloring. "I think she cares for me as much as she can for any one except her own fair self. I am not of a jealous temperament."

Oriole laughed in his face.

"You do not care enough for her to be jealous. Suppose I were to encourage Mr. Gathorne? You know he stands ready to marry me at the first word of encouragement I give him. It may be the best thing I can do. He is noble and true—he is not a double lover: his pride does not lead him to break her heart whom he vows he loves! Perhaps I shall be a bride before Irene St. Mark is, after all!"

"I can do Mr. Gathorne still a greater favor than to marry him! Ay, for your sake, Mr. Morley, who will make no sacrifice for me, I have done a wrong and unjust thing. I have kept Mr. Gathorne from his own. I have it in my power—mine, Eugene!—to try the love of your betrothed, if it be of the right mettle—to ruin you—to hurl you down to poverty—to place your brother where you now are, and to become his wife, and mistress of Morley Beeches!"

She had risen to her feet and stood before him, her lithe young figure drawn up to its full height, her eyes flashing, her voice ringing—all the pride and passion of the Darien blood shining in her lovely face.

"What do you mean?"—his voice trembled slightly.

"What I have said. Mr. Morley, it is strange you have never asked me where I got the jewels I wore the night of your ball."

"Hardly strange, if you remember how our only interview since then terminated. I had meant to ask you then—only I had promised not to speak with you alone. Why, how did you come by them?"

Again she laughed, almost with a cruel triumph; her heart was very full of bitterness against the man she would yet have died to serve—so contradictory are love's moods.

"I have solved the mysterious 'Black Riddle'—long ago—the very day after you came home—quite by accident. I have Mrs. Morley's diamonds, her portraits, her letter of advice to her little son—and her true and only will, written and witnessed the day before she died—a will which leaves everything to Felix Gathorne—everything! You are a beggar, Mr. Morley! But I loved you, and I concealed what I had discovered—said no word to any human being. It made me almost hate Felix, to know that he was the heir, and that I ought to give him these things. I could not make up my mind to do it."

"You have not given them to him, then?"

"Not yet. Listen. The night they thought you dying—the night of your relapse—I was here, on this very spot, waiting for Mrs. Chaldecott to bring me news of you, when Irene

and her mother approached and stood in the walk and talked together. Irene told her mother that she was going to ask you to marry her that night, in order that she might be left a rich widow—those were her words—yes! she coolly plotted for her own welfare when she believed you dying! I was so indignant that I followed and told her you were not the heir. She affected not to believe me—but she did not propose to you to leave her your widow! Go, marry her, if you choose, Mr. Morley! Do you think, if I should place your brother in possession of the will, on your marriage morning, your proud bride would lead you a happy life in the future?"

"Oriole, if this is true which you tell me, do you think I will marry the lady, allowing her to be deceived? Do you think I will keep from Felix Gathorne what is proven to be his? Nay, I am selfish, fond of pleasure, thoughtless, wicked, anything you please—but I am not a robber of other men! I have some honor, I hope. Prove to me that this place belongs to my brother, and I shall not keep him out of it one day—one hour! Oriole, what are you crying for?"

For she had burst into passionate weeping and was wringing her hands; now that, in a sudden passion of jealousy, she had told him, she was sorry and frightened, and would have given much to take back what she had said.

"I don't want you to be poor, Mr. Morley! I can't bear to have it so! It shall not be so! Mr. Gathorne is used to it—as I am; but you—what could you do without Morley Beeches and your great income and grand surroundings? They suit you—you were born to wear the purple! Ah, forget what I have said! I was angry and—jealous; I made up a story to vex you."

"Oriole," and Eugene spoke with a sternness she did not before know he was capable of. "You have told me; I am no longer in ignorance; your repentance comes too late. I know that Felix has always secretly believed himself the heir; I thought him a monomaniac on that subject. If he is right, and I am wrong, it is high time we should come to an understanding. You say that you have the will—show it to me—now; to-morrow I am to leave Morley Beeches; this phase of affairs may alter all my plans in life. Bring me the papers you tell me of."

"Do not ask me for them, Mr. Morley. I shall kill myself if I am the means of ruining your hopes! Oh, why did I not keep silent?"

"Hush, little one! You should have told me long ago."

"That my hand should be the hand to wound you!"

"You are only doing right now. It was all wrong for you to keep this important secret from those most interested. Come, my darling, this is a business that must be settled this afternoon."

"You will hate me," she said, half-wildly. "I have proved your curse. Oh, I am a thousand times worse than Irene! Why did I speak?"

He took her hot little hand in one of his and with the other smoothed her dusky hair.

"Never mind, I know that you love me much more than I deserve. The nasturtiums are gone—do you remember, you wore them the first time I saw you. How well they became my bright Oriole! Come! time flies. Where are these mysterious papers? at the Lodge?"

"Yes. Will you come there with me? Father is away but Betty is there; and if father were to see you walking in with me he would hardly try to kill you again," she added, with a melancholy smile.

"Does he know about the will?"

"No one knows, Mr. Morley—except what I told Miss St. Mark. You have only to keep to yourself what you may learn, and things will go on as they have always done."

"Do not tempt me, little traitor," he answered, as they went on toward the Lodge, and he sighed heavily.

She looked up anxiously in his face; he was pale, his sunny look had given place to one of care; it was a crushing trouble she had dragged down on the light spirits of the young aristocrat who had never known what it was to exercise self-denial. She could not picture Eugene Morley, the gay, the debonair, brought down to pinching economy, robbed of his surrounding magnificence; her tears flowed afresh.

Little Betty, sunning herself on the doorstep, sprang up to admit them into the little parlor.

"I be dreadful glad to see you again, Miss Oriole," said the child.

"Poor Betty! You are lonely here, I know. Mr. Morley, I have not set foot in my father's house since that—day by the lake. But the box is here, and you say I must produce it. Sit

down a few moments while I go for it; it is in a locked closet of my sleeping-room."

In a little while Oriole came down drooping under the weight of the worm-eaten, brass-bound box she had dug up from its sleep of years in the garden; Eugene sprang to aid her, eying the box with deep curiosity as he placed it on the desk near by.

"Oh, oh!" ejaculated Oriole, sitting down as if her trembling limbs refused to support her.

"The papers are gone!"

"Gone!"

"Gone! Everything else is in the box as I left it. Nothing has been taken but the papers. Who could have done it?"

"Oriole, I fear this is a ruse of yours! You have repented of telling me, and now you wish to make it appear the will is lost," he spoke gravely, with a searching look in his eyes.

"You are mistaken. I swear to you, Mr. Morley, I left the will, with other papers, along with these diamonds, this gold, the miniature—taking the two keys of the box and of the cupboard with me when I went with Mrs. Chaldecott—and that it is now gone. I cannot even imagine who the robber can be. Not my father, I know! Not little Betty—she would have chosen the gold and trinkets."

She leaned back in her chair white and faint with the shock.

"It looks as if the thief must have some knowledge of the existence of such papers," remarked Eugene, thoughtfully. "It must be Felix."

That was the most natural—seemingly the only—conclusion to which they could come. Had not Felix always been hoping to find the will? Had he not everything to gain by such a discovery?

"Mr. Gathorne was quite familiar with the Lodge," said Oriole. "He may have observed where we kept the door-key. He has had abundant leisure to prosecute his search in father's absence."

"It must be Felix," repeated Eugene, his face as pale as the girl's. "Well," he added, with an attempt to rally from his consternation, "it is all right. It saves me the trouble of telling him."

CHAPTER XXI.

GOOD-BY, FOREVER.

We must love, and unlove, and forget, dear.

—BULWER.

There's not a flower, there's not a tree
In this old garden where we sit,
But what some fragrant memory
Is folded up in it.

—IBID.

"Is it not getting chilly for you to be out, Eugene?"

The dressing-bell was ringing as young Morley, after a few more words with Oriole, came up the stately beech avenue to the house; it was his brother, who had been walking up and down the broad porch alone, who accosted him with an air of affectionate solicitude—for, although Felix Gathorne would have liked his own as well as any man, it did not prevent his being very fond of his bright, handsome, sunny-tempered companion. And the danger so lately escaped had made every one tender of Eugene.

"Perhaps—I had not thought of it," responded the convalescent, coming up the low, broad stone steps rather slowly, for he was tired. "I have been quite excited, this afternoon, Felix, about something which nearly concerns both of us," and coming close to his brother, he looked him full in the eyes, expecting the other's look to betray consciousness of the secret he was keeping from him; but Felix regarded him with unfeigned surprise, waiting for him to say more.

"I understand that you have recently come into possession of important papers—papers, which, if you really have them, you should inform me of before I leave here."

"Important papers? I have no idea to what you refer, Eugene. I have come into possession of no papers." There was no doubting the utter sincerity of this declaration; the word of Felix Gathorne was above suspicion, always, and now his frank eyes flashed with sudden interest. "What have you heard, old fellow, and who did you hear it from?"

"Oh, never mind, now, Felix; I see I was misinformed," was answered with seeming carelessness. "Is that the dressing-bell? Well, I think my aunt will excuse an elaborate evening toilet; I am too tired to climb the stairs before dinner. I will rest on the lounge in the library until it is ready."

"Do. There is a delightful fire there—just the kind of fire, and just the hour for a lover to dream by."

"Have you been trying it, Felix?" with a laugh.

"Yes. I have been dreaming; but my visions were scarcely so rose-colored as yours will be, Eugene. You are one of the blind goddess's favorites, while I am one she despises. You know that I am not of a whining habit, old boy; but the question has occurred to me, why, since my handsome brother had everything else, that little Gipsy girl at the Lodge could not have happened to fall in love with me! There would have been some compensation in that!"

"I believe I should knock you in the head if she had!" laughed Eugene. "There! don't preach! I acknowledge the truth of all you can say! I am doomed to act like a scoundrel when that girl is concerned!—and always without meaning it. The fact is," with sudden gravity, "I love her better than anybody in the world! I don't want to—don't mean to—but can't help it. I know it will not do—that I must fight against it. Once away from here, I hope to come to my senses; but, oh, Felix, isn't she maddeningly beautiful!—and so childlike! so confiding! so every way captivating! so deliciously spirited, and yet—"

"You have seen her this afternoon," interrupted Felix, dryly. "Spare me the pain of listening to what I know too well, already."

"Forgive me, brother; I am always forgetting that you, too—"

"How about that lounge in the library, drawn up before the fire?"

"I am going," muttered the lover, and, as he went slowly through the darkening hall he said to himself—"We have made a mistake. It was not Felix who took the will! He knows nothing,"—and, despite his heroic resolve to keep nothing proved to be another's, Eugene Morley drew a long breath of relief at this assurance.

It would be a sublime act of self-abnegation to give up the heirship unless Felix's right was brought plainly before him. If the will could not be found, might not Oriole be mistaken in her understanding of it? Could it be his duty to go to his brother and say—"Here! I have heard there is in existence a will in your favor!—take my place and give me yours! You are the millionaire—I, the poor dependent." He lay on the couch, staring at the fire, asking himself questions like these, until Dapple, who had twice summoned him to dinner, ventured in to ask if his young master were ill.

"Ill! no, Dapple," answered the young gentleman, with one of his old merry laughs. "I hope not, again. I am well enough—hungry, too! I trust you have something appetizing in store for me," and he went out to the lighted dining-room, ate a good dinner, conversed cheerfully with Miss Wormely and his brother—he had made up his mind to leave Morley Beeches in the morning saying nothing to Felix of what Miss Darien had told him; if the heir knew nothing of this precious will was it not likely that it had fallen into the possession of a person favorable to himself? So it seemed to him; and with his customary dislike of care or mental exertion, Eugene took the threatened danger lightly.

When they came back to the library a servant told Mr. Morley that Miss Darien wished to speak with him a moment at the door; he went and found Oriole there with the box.

"You forgot to take this away with you, Mr. Morley. It is proven that it is not safe at the Lodge. I shall leave it for you to decide to whom the jewels belong. I should think Mr. Gathorne would be glad of his mother's miniature. Are you going in the morning?"

"Yes, Oriole; I see no reason for changing my plans."

The inquisitive servant stood in the background; there was nothing to be did or said; these two, who loved each other, must part—he loved her, but not well enough to do and dare all things for her sake! The sneers of society were powerful; besides, there was his engagement. He knew very well that Irene would not hesitate to defend her claims, even to a suit for damages, should he break with her now—he knew the verdict of the world would be in her favor—in short, there seemed no way open to that sweeter path of happiness which Oriole and he might have trodden through life, had they met earlier.

The girl forced the box into his arms.

"Good-by, Mr. Morley. You know my father is going to send me away to school. I shall have left here forever before your return. So, it is good-by, forever," and turning abruptly she ran down the steps and fled in the direction of the garden; for she was on her way back to Mrs. Chaldecott's cottage.

"Here, Michael, take this to my room and set

it down there," said Eugene, handing the servant the box, and, as the latter went up the stairs with it, was off, like an arrow from the bow, into the rustling, dry, twilight flower-garden.

Had she escaped him entirely? Was it true, that bitter word she had spoken—parted forever? He looked about in the shadowy place. A pale bar of fading orange yet belted the western sky; the weird, melancholy November wind sighed in the moldering flower-stalks and whispered in the evergreens; a great, yellow moon just showed her golden hemisphere on the eastern horizon. In this growing illumination he saw a figure standing by the statue of Psyche. He crept silently nearer and nearer, until he could hear the suppressed sobs, see the bowed head, the glory of dusky hair falling disheveled about the lovely face, the beautiful arm thrown up and clasping the cold marble.

"Eugene, Eugene," she moaned, in a low, desolate voice, "you do not love me—never loved me! It is the world—appearances, that you prize! How calmly you let me go! Oh, I would that I were dead—dead—dead!" He heard every word. The sight of her in her grief and beauty would have melted a colder heart than his; it fired him to rash passion which could only end in making them both more unhappy.

In a moment his arms were around her; she was sobbing on his breast, while he murmured unreasonable words which to-morrow must be repented of; fond, endearing, foolish words that would be laughed at if coldly set down for eyes to scan; but which sounded sweet beyond any other music on earth to the infatuated girl who listened to them.

"You must not say that I do not love you, Oriole. I love one smile of yours—one kiss—better than the favors of all the women on earth. I would rather have you for my wife than any princess born. If it were not that I am as firmly bound to Irene as if already married—that nothing will excuse me from not keeping my promise to her now—I would allow nothing to come between us, my darling. Oh, do not think that I am less sensible of the cruelty of our fate than you—that I feel it less keenly! I seem to feel the very fibers of heart and soul torn apart in leaving you this way, Oriole. I would be willing to give up all and be your father's clerk for the sweet delight of being with you. Oh, it is hard that we, who love as we do, should be kept apart."

And then she, womanlike, seeing him really miserable, ceased to reproach and began to comfort him—to beg of him to take their cruel separation as lightly as possible—not to fret about her, she would try to be brave—and so, with piteous tears and clinging kisses, and many, many last words and last clinging of fond hands, they parted; and she, shivering and cold with despair, crept slowly homeward by the yellow moonlight; and he—went up to his room and packed away in one of his trunks the costly jewels of the Gathornes, to be reset, in latest fashion, as his wedding present to his bride.

"How glorious she looked in them the night of the ball," he sighed to himself. "Alas, she will never wear them again!"

As to that—we shall see. "Man proposes—God disposes."

The fortunes of Eugene Morley, or his loves, may not yet be declared.

CHAPTER XXII.

BEFORE THE WEDDING.

I'm off with wit, and beauty will fade,
And blood alone is no worth a shilling;
But he that is rich his market is made,
For ilka charm about him is killing.

—ALLEN RAMSEY.

"HAVE the cards gone out to-day, Irene?"

"No, mamma—Tiffany has the list; but I told him not to send them out until I sent him word."

"It should have been done to-day. Two weeks should be given for a fashionable wedding."

"A couple of days less will answer. I confess, mamma, to feeling a shade of superstition about it. Eugene was telegraphed for by Felix to go out to Morley Beeches on business of importance. Eugene will not return before to-morrow; suppose something should happen to break off our marriage—it would be much less awkward if the invitations had not been made public."

"What on earth are you talking about, child! You frighten me with your 'superstitions' and your 'suppositions'! What could possibly happen to break off the marriage?"

"There might be a collision on the railway and Eugene be killed," answered the bride-elect, with a little cold laugh.

"You make me shudder! How can you imagine such things? They make me nervous. For Heaven's sake, I pray nothing will now occur to make us trouble, Irene. I have drawn part of our last five thousand dollars. A suit of rooms in a fashionable hotel for two months, and your trousseau, have taken a large slice of the pittance remaining to us. Remember, you are in debt to me fourteen thousand dollars, my dear. I hope Mr. Morley will not grumble at having to pay it."

"Mr. Morley is generous, whatever other faults he may have; he will pay it without a murmur—provided he has the means!"

"Has the means! I understood his income was not less than sixty thousand a year."

"You understood quite right, mamma; only, people sometimes lose their incomes. I am not certain but I would do better to take up with the rich West Indian who has admired me so devotedly ever since we came to the Clarendon. They say his income runs over a hundred thousand a year! It is true he is over fifty, very small and very yellow, and has a temper, but—the excess in the income ought to balance matters!"

"How your tongue runs on to-day, Irene! I suppose you are just talking to tease me. The Señor Rolando is desperately 'smitten,' as any one can see; but I don't think the difference in their wealth in his favor can compensate for his not being of our own nation, nor young, nor good-looking—though he certainly is very gentlemanly;—yet, what is the use discussing it," continued the mother, flying about rather wildly in the construction of her sentences, "when you are as good as married to Eugene, with your wedding-dress spread out on the bed in the next room, and his wedding-gift locked up in Tiffany's safes?—a present as magnificent as any the Señor would have given you, I think!—the loveliest diamonds and emeralds I ever saw! Oh, what a necklace! and that aigrette for the hair! And that other set, with the sapphires! I do think that sapphire butterfly ought to win any girl's heart! It is simply exquisite—fascinating! I would not look at the Señor beside Eugene Morley—so handsome, so open-hearted, so good-tempered!—I tell you, Irene, you have drawn the capital prize in the lottery of matrimony! If you were to have a thousand chances you could not better yourself! Thank goodness you are so well off my hands! There won't be a finer wedding this winter. Eugene has ordered the flowers for the church, as well as for the parlors at Delmonico's, and they are to be the choicest, most unique that money can pay for. I wonder what on earth Felix telegraphed for him to come to Morley Beeches for just now! He must know it is no suitable time."

"Remember, mamma, we are going South to be gone some time. It may have been necessary."

"Yes; but Felix was to be here to the wedding; they could have had their conference then."

"Dear me, it's not such a journey to Morley Beeches, mamma! What is a fifty-mile ride in the cars?"

"Yet it was you first expressed uneasiness."

"Not exactly uneasiness. I said I felt the creeping of a superstitious shadow; owing, no doubt, to my having a slight headache. It was a whim of mine to leave the cards until Eugene's return. Has it ever struck you, mamma, that Eugene is not a very devoted lover?"

"Why, no!" answered Mrs. St. Mark, with an alarmed look at her beautiful daughter, leaning back languidly in an easy-chair, pulling to pieces one of the Jacqueminot roses her betrothed had given her before he went away, and scattering the rich red petals over her dress of cream-colored brocade over pale-blue satin. "Why, no! that would be the last thing to strike me. I have thought him most charmingly devoted—so graceful in his attentions! so tasteful in his gifts! quite the model fiancé."

Irene was silent a moment, completing the ruin of the rose. Her bodice heaved a little more quickly than was natural, making the diamonds in her corsage bouquet sparkle; her long golden eyelashes quivered, and her pink lips trembled as she began speaking:

"It is remorse, not love, that makes him so gallant, mamma. He does not love me one particle!—all the love of which his light nature is capable is centered on that little country beauty—that black-eyed girl at the Lodge at Morley Beeches. If he were free from me he would marry her the next day!"

"Are you mad?" murmured the managing mamma, aghast. "Oh, this is too absurd! I

thought you had too much pride for such jealousy, Irene!—that you had too good an opinion of your own charms."

"I am not jealous—at least, not very jealous—for I am not deeply enough infatuated to make me so. Eugene is very agreeable; I admire him; I could live comfortably with him—but his loss would not break my heart. I am proud, mother—too proud to care to be the wife of a man madly in love with somebody else!"

"Irene, you fill me with terror! For pity's sake, don't cherish such fancies! If Eugene desired to marry that low creature he would have done it long ago. Marry her, indeed! You do not understand men, my dear. They have dozens of fancies, the best of them; yet, when it comes to the choice of a wife, you will find, they are most circumspect—she must be, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. That girl was desperately pretty, there's no denying; and I dare say she was flattered by the young master's admiration and flirted outrageously; but I would not condescend to be jealous of her, my dear. I declare, you gave me quite a shock, speaking as you did. I shall not get over it all the evening."

"It's your rôle to be nervous, mamma. Come, I will tell you what to do: send our waiter to the Señor with an invitation to join us at dinner. Since Eugene is away we must fill his place; it is *triste* dining alone in our little parlor."

The mother studied the fair, languid countenance of her daughter to read what this might mean; Irene returned her gaze with a cold smile.

"It is only a bit of politeness, mamma, in return for his flowers and his opera tickets. He will probably take us to the Academy to-night—which will help us to 'pass the weary time till our lord's return.' Send Ambrose, at once, please, before it is too late."

Mrs. St. Mark seldom thought of disobeying her imperious daughter; Ambrose was summoned and dispatched to Señor Felipe Rolando's apartments with the compliments of the ladies, who would be delighted if he had no engagement to prevent his dining with them in their parlor.

The Señor had no engagement—or was pleased to consider that he had none—which would prevent this great honor and pleasure; he came promptly to the moment, bringing an exquisite bouquet of white roses, lilies-of-the-valley and maiden-hair ferns for Miss St. Mark, and opera tickets for the three. There was a very nice little dinner, with as choice wines as New York afforded, though Mrs. St. Mark was in despair to think how far beneath in quality they must be to the genuine *amontillado* filling the cellars of Monsieur Rolando at his own home.

The Señor was quite satisfied with the dinner, including the wine. Never had Irene looked handsomer or been more brilliant than she was that evening. The languor and headache, which had troubled her all day, disappeared as by magic. A lovely light shone in her sapphire eyes; a lovely pink bloomed in her delicate cheeks; she was all smiles and little sallies of wit, the more bewitching from one so haughty.

The dark West Indian raved inwardly over her blonde beauty; to him, she was altogether the loveliest woman he had ever beheld. He would have flung himself and his millions at her feet, weeks ago, had it not been well understood that Mr. Morley was shortly "to lead her to the altar." To-night he was fascinated out of all prudence; he could not take his eyes from her fair, fair face; he drank his wine, and thought it *elixir vitae*; so young and happy did he feel with this beautiful creature smiling across the table at him.

He wished there had been a thousand people, instead of a dozen, to see him lead her into the carriage when they departed for the Academy of Music, he was so proud of her, her grace, her elegant toilet, her beauty.

"If you were only to be mine!" he went so far as to whisper, pressing her little gloved hand as he sat beside her, leaving the whole back seat for the care of madame's handsome velvet. "What would I not sacrifice for that great felicity? Happy Morley! the very gods might envy him!"

Irene laughed her silver laugh, "low with fashion, not with feeling," as she murmured:

"What if he were unaware of his own good fortune? 'A prophet hath no honor in his own country,'—neither has a beauty. I dare say, now, in the tropics, my blue eyes and gold hair would be appreciated at their full value. Here they are so commonplace that even Mr. Morley is not enthusiastic over them."

"Not? Not enthusiastic? He is very devoted."

If I had not observed *that*, I would have tried much to—what you call it?—cut him out. Oh, yes, I would enter the lists against him—I would press him hard—I would have him to fight for his lady. Ah-h! if only I came not too late, mademoiselle," and he sighed deeply.

"While there is life, there is hope, Señor," responded Irene, gayly.

She could see, as the carriage stopped, and the footman opened the door, by the glare of light in front of the Academy, the puzzled stare of astonishment, and fear, and delight with which he was regarding her; and she laughed again, a merry laugh which might mean encouragement or mockery, as he chose to take it.

She kept up that dazzling, puzzling manner all through the opera.

A thrill of fiery hope ran through the warm veins of the West Indian.

"If she is playing with me, she does it well," he thought. "It is curious, the way she treats me to-night! Mr. Morley is gone—can they have had a lover's quarrel? If so, now is my time to take the advantage of it. How beautiful she is! They all turn their lorgnettes to this box. Such an air as she has!—and dresses like the empress!"

His passion and hope shone in the bright, black eyes which lighted up his thin, dark face; he was immensely impressive in his attentions; immensely sorry when the long opera came to an end, and the short drive to the hotel, and he was obliged to say good-night to the ladies at the door of their parlor, kissing their fingertips and asking permission to call in the morning to inquire after their health.

"It is plainly to be seen you could have him at your feet at a word," complained the mother, as the door shut him out.

"Quite plainly; and perhaps I shall speak the word, mamma!"

"You are jesting, Irene! Don't do it! I am very fond of Eugene; I am really attached to him. He seems like my own son. Something must have happened—beginning to wipe her eyes—"you must have quarreled before he went off, to be talking like this, Irene."

"How affectionate you have become, all of a sudden, to poor Eugene," said Irene, mockingly; and turning to remove the lace and flowers from her hair, at the great mirror, she gave a sudden cry.

Some one, who had been sitting on the sofa three hours awaiting their return, who had not before been perceived by either of them, rose from her place.

"Pardon me, Miss St. Mark," she stammered, "for intruding here. I have come to you, unknown to them all, to do you a service."

"You, to do me a service!"

"I believe you will consider it so."

"This is strange, Miss Darien."

"Yes, it is strange."

"You look very pale and tired. Will you have anything?"

"Your maid brought me a cup of tea. I wish nothing more. I—I would have liked to have gone back this evening—but it is too late now. There will be no train; and I should be afraid."

"You can sleep with my maid. Will you tell me your errand now, Miss Darien, or, will you wait until morning?"

"I will tell it now. I must return early in the morning. I do not care to have them know that I came here."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE WAY SHE MANAGED IT.

I have strained the spider's thread
Against the promise of a maid;
I have weighed a grain of sand
Against her plight of heart and hand.

—SCOTT.

At twelve the following morning General Carlington's carriage drew up before the Clarendon and his two pretty daughters descended therefrom and went directly to Mrs. St. Mark's parlor, where they found the two ladies they had come to see.

"Irene, our dresses have come!" they cried in one voice, after saluting madame. "They arrived on the steamer yesterday—they are exquisite! just the sweetest things! Oh, you must get in the carriage and come right over and see them!"

"Pale pink satin slips with over-dresses of some soft, white crepe stuff with point-lace and flowers of white lilac!" ran on Violet.

"Of course yours came, too! May we see it?" asked Pansy. "Oh, how delighted I am to think you asked us to be bridesmaids! We do enjoy it so much! I suppose the cards were sent out yesterday? Will not De Witt make a handsome usher in his cadet's uniform? What's

the matter with you, Irene? Did not your dress arrive? You are so pale and worried-looking—it will be simply dreadful if you are kept in anxiety about your things!"

"Oh, yes, indeed, it will be awfully provoking," chimed in Violet. "I hope nothing will happen—no accident to the steamer. It would be sad enough if she should encounter an iceberg, or take fire, and your lovely, lovely *trousseau* should go to the bottom!"

"Do not borrow trouble, girls," said the bride-elect, with her cold smile. "If you will allow me to slip in a word edgewise I will inform you that my things have arrived, all right—in seven flat packing-cases which Rose opened yesterday. The dress is now laid out on the couch in our sleeping-room and Rose will show you the others if you ask her. I have a headache, and if you will excuse me, while you look at them, I will keep quiet."

"Certainly." "Oh, thanks!" "Oh, you darling!"—they kissed her and rushed off into the adjoining room, where their exclamations of rapture were too much for Mrs. St. Mark to hear without joining in the entertainment; she arose and followed the bridesmaids, leaving her daughter alone, lying on a sofa, pale and with that slight frown drawing down her delicate brows which betrayed her to be either ill or ill at ease.

Yet, she had not neglected her looks. Her morning toilet was of the daintiest, and there were fresh roses in her belt and golden hair. She looked more girlish and fair than even in her costly evening-dress at the opera. She was not looking for Eugene until the afternoon; but Señor Rolando had asked permission to call that morning, and she had not spared Rose trouble in making her charming for the occasion.

Ah, here he came, the little dark gentleman, with his elaborate civilities and the usual ten-dollar bouquet of rare cut-flowers—so polite, so impressive and so—tiresome. One of Eugene's frank smiles and unstudied sentences were worth an hour of Señor Felipe Rolando's fine efforts to please. Is it not said that "blessings brighten as they take their flight"? Never had the image of her absent fiancé floated so fairly in Irene's mind—his laughing, deep-blue eyes, his sunny expression, his blonde beauty of fair hair and clear, lightly-flushing complexion.

"I never dreamed I thought so much of him!" she had told herself more than once during the sleepless hours of the preceding night. Fair, indeed, did Eugene's youth and comeliness rise up in contrast to the dark, thin features, the crisp, black curls, the sharp, bright eyes, the fifty years of the West Indian, who lingered and lingered over his morning call, very evidently loth to put an end to it. There were seven tin-lined cases of finery to be examined in the adjoining room; so it goes without saying that the Misses Carlington tarried there a goodly time.

"When does Monsieur Morley return?" asked Rolando, secretly noting a certain melancholy in the fair face before him.

"Soon enough—this afternoon," was the languid reply.

"Soon enough! Yet mademoiselle's cheek is already pale!"

"Not at Mr. Morley's absence," she said, with a sweet smile.

"No! What else can make her so triste?"

"I found a very important message awaiting me after we parted from you last night, señor."

Irene said this slowly, looking down at the diamond engagement-ring on her white hand, and sighing.

"Nothing bad—nothing to make you unhappy, Miss St. Mark?"

"Señor, if I dared—to confide in you," she almost whispered.

"You would do me too much honor—make me too happy!" he said, eagerly, his dark face brightening.

"Ah, but this is a serious matter. You would have to be a true friend."

The señor made a movement as if he would kneel at her feet, but she raised her hands entreatingly and he sunk back in his chair.

"I need some one to advise me," she went on, looking at him piteously out of her blue eyes.

"My mother is very good, of course; but she is a woman, like myself; and I need the practical advice of a brother—a friend—some one, who would look at my trouble not with the romantic ideas my mother has, but with masculine wisdom. I have thought of you, señor."

"Ah! You flatter me most immensely—you make me very happy; but, why not Mr. Morley?" he added, checking his extravagant expressions of pleasure and regarding her with suspicion.

"There it is, señor! You may well ask that! How can I consult Mr. Morley? He will not be a *disinterested* adviser—far from it!—while you, señor, surely would be entirely disinterested."

"Certainly, oh, entirely, of course! If I can advise you—if I can do you any favor, from the least to the greatest, all that I have is at your command, mademoiselle! You cannot but be aware of my keen desire to be your friend—of my ardent admiration—my—"

"There, hush, Señor Rolando! Your Southern fancy gets the better of your conscience," she interrupted him, with a merry laugh.

"Really, I never knew that you a *united* me, particularly," and she looked at him with artless naïveté, "but you Southern gentlemen are such flatterers! Well, it will not be necessary for you to admire me—only to be my friend and give me sincere advice. Oh, I am very unhappy after all," she cried out, with a sudden change of manner, the tears welling up into those sapphire springs of light, "very, very unhappy! If I had a brother to protect my rights I should not be treated so! Look, señor, on that table—that envelope—will you examine it?"

Half-bewildered, Rolando took up the thick, creamy envelope, while Irene, rising from the sofa, walked up and down the room, wringing her white hands.

"Why, these are the wedding-cards of Miss St. Mark and Mr. Morley," he said, looking agitated and disappointed. "Do you show them to me to disconcert—embarrass me, mademoiselle? Yet I knew it, of course! I understand everything but your attitude this morning. How can you need a brother—a friend—when you have a husband so close at hand?"

"Because it is he who wrongs me!"—as Irene thus answered she paused before him, her eyes flashing, her head thrown back.

"By Heaven, then I will fight him!" exclaimed the señor, smiling for joy at the thought. "You make me too proud—too happy, Miss St. Mark. Ask of me what you will—for you to command is for me to obey."

"I only want your friendly advice," murmured Irene. "I have taken it into my head that you are a man of judgment. Listen, señor. I cannot say much now, for we may be interrupted any moment. Mr. Morley has been false to me!"

"I am glad to hear it," murmured the señor, not knowing exactly what he was saying. "Yet it is incredible that any man so favored should be false to you, mademoiselle."

"I suspected it last summer—now I know it."

"It is fortunate that you are convinced in time," was the significant answer.

"In time! Ah, señor; all the world knows—"

"Pah, what matters what the world knows! The vows have not been spoken at the altar—that is enough. If you marry one of whom you are jealous you will be miserable,"—he spoke eagerly, rapidly. "Mademoiselle, there is one who loves you truly and only—who would be as happy as he was proud, to win you away from the poor creature who does not *laif* appreciate you—"

"Spare me," murmured Irene, covering her eyes with her hands. "Remember that I loved him—that I expected—"

"Ah, but let me teach you to forget him! He is unworthy to bring one small tear into those eyes that I adore. You are right—I will not be selfish—sit down, dear Miss St. Mark, and tell me all."

Irene sunk gracefully into the easy-chair near her, drew her lace handkerchief across her arched eyelids, and began, falteringly:

"She came here, last night—was waiting for me when I entered, after saying good-night to you. On her knees she told me that I would make Mr. Morley wretched for life if I persisted in marrying him, knowing that he loved her to distraction! She avowed that a sentiment of honor alone prevented his breaking the engagement! Señor, I might not have believed her, had I not seen with my own eyes, heard with my own ears, so much of this while we were at Morley Beeches, his country-seat. His conduct with her was the scandal of the whole place. It even went so far that her father shot him, and came within a hair's-breadth of killing him. And who do you think she is who thus rivals Irene St. Mark?—a rustic beauty—the daughter of the keeper of the Lodge! Oh, but it was an insult bitter to bear! However, he confessed to a passing folly, begged my pardon, implored forgiveness—we came away, and once free from her vile influence, he seemed again my true, manly love. The preparations for our marriage have gone on. There were extensive alterations going on at the Beeches; and when Mr. Morley went out there, now and then,

to see, as he said, how these were progressing, I was too proud to feel or betray suspicion.

"Yet, last night, I find this girl in my room, come here to tell me that Mr. Morley is breaking his heart because he sees no honorable way of breaking off our marriage. Señor, I have no father—no brother—or I should not have been thus! I have passed a miserable night. When you came in, a little while ago, and I saw you, a gentleman and man of honor, so kind and friendly, the temptation to ask your advice was overwhelming."

"There is only one thing to be done—break off your engagement with him. The dismissal will come from you; it will be unpleasant, the—what you call it?—notoriety, for a little time; but you cannot be harmed. If there is any censure, it must fall on him. And you will find a thousand admirers ready to—champion, is that it?—your cause, and one among them who would give a world, had he so much to give—"

Again Irene held up her white hands, beseeching silence.

"Remember what I am suffering," she pleaded.

"I forget; but I will have patience—I can wait," he said, eagerly.

"Do not speak of this to a living soul until I give you permission, Señor."

He laid his hand on his heart and bowed; she gave him a faint, sad smile, eloquent of gratitude; then, Ambrose, knocking, asked if he should bring in luncheon; and the Misses Carlington came in, radiant, while the Señor rose and made his adieux, and the door closed on his happy face, leaving Irene unable, for a moment, to look her visitors in the eyes for fear they should detect the strange smile of triumph in her own.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DIANA.

I dreamt of my lady, I dreamt of her grief.

But she is crazed! Believe not what she says!
—CAMPBELL.
—SHELLEY.

FELIX GATHORNE had been wandering, in a restless mood, over the great, solitary house. It was the week before Christmas, and the city artisans, who had been decorating the drawing-rooms, library—all the first floor, in fact—with lovely frescoes, rich paneling, Japanese designs in costly wall-papers, paint and gilding, ebonyized dados and carved mantle-pieces, had gone to their homes for the holidays. Himself and Mrs. Rice, the housekeeper, were the only human creatures in the great mansion. Even the lodge was fastened up and deserted; Zophiel Darien had gone to New York to look out for some occupation in which he could employ the few thousand dollars of his savings to advantage; and as there was no need of a gate-keeper during the winter, little Betty had gone to live with Mrs. Chaldecott. His brother had been urging Felix, for the past fortnight, to leave his "den," at Morley Beeches, and come down to the city for a little pleasuring before the wedding, which was to take place in the first week of the New Year. He had felt no inclination to accept these invitations so far; but, to-day, he was certainly lonely; his social instincts had begun to assert themselves after long repression; it was absolutely melancholy to roam from room to room, from gallery to gallery, with no semblance of humanity to welcome him but the portraits on the walls.

Outside, a soft, light, feathery snow was coming lazily down—too lazily and too lightly to give any promise of sleighing for Christmas; indeed, a bit of blue was already showing over the trees at the west.

Pacing up and down in the picture-gallery, pausing often by the double window at the end to look at the bare, brown forest, the dun clouds, the flying feathers of snow, the break of blue in the horizon, Felix thought of many things—among others, of rumors he had heard of a certain sort of moral or mental insanity which had seized upon Zophiel Darien—the insanity of going into Wall street with his little savings—not more than ten thousand dollars in all—and there entering the lists against the experienced speculators whose daily food was just such morsels as this man's board.

"Of course they will gobble his poor little ten thousand dollars in no time; and then, Oriole will have to come out of that expensive school where he has placed her. I thought Darien a person of sounder judgment. I wonder when I shall see her again! It has been more lonely here than as if she and Mrs. Chaldecott had remained at the lodge, as I expected them to when I made my plans for the winter. Better for me, undoubtedly! She will never love me; and to

have gone on feeding my passion on her sweet looks—listening to her divine singing—watching the development of her flower-like loveliness, would have been folly—madness!"

"I believe I will go and call on Mrs. Chaldecott. It is more than a week since I have done so. I am very fond of her. Poor, solitary, friendless, as she seems to be, she is the most perfect lady I have ever met. I wonder what is the charm she has for me! Is it that she was my mother's friend?—that my mother loved her? She seems to return the interest I feel in her. It is evident that she believes me the heir and longs to befriend me by proving it."

"Yes, I must have a good run in the open air, to shake off 'the blues.' What better direction than Mrs. Chaldecott's cottage? Let me see—it is three o'clock only—plenty of time for a nice call and home again before dark"—and he ran down-stairs, put on a light overcoat, a seal-skin cap particularly becoming to his dark eyes and regular features, seized a stout walking-stick, and set out on his ramble through fields and woods.

"By the by," his thoughts went on, "I have not made that second visit to old Diana yet! I thought surely to have done it before this. I would have gone there to-day had I remembered about it earlier; it is only a five-mile jaunt and back."

As it was, it was rather late, and he continued on in the path through the woods which would take him out near the cottage.

A delightful surprise awaited him when Esther opened the door to his knock. There, by the bright fire, sat Oriole Darien: Oriole, lovelier far than even his enthusiastic memory of her! The journey, the excitement of meeting her friend, the glow of the fire on her splendid colorings—it was not these things alone which made her so beautiful; but a more womanly expression, and even—for fashion has a charm for all of us—the style and finish of her toilet, quite equal to that of the most aristocratic of Madame Mirabeau's young ladies.

And there, on the opposite side of the hearth, sat Zophiel Darien, regarding his lovely child with a still, deep gaze of exultation, as if fully aware of the growth of her perfections and triumphing in the secret sense that his love and his money had fostered them.

Mrs. Chaldecott's pale, sweet face wore its brightest expression. In the little kitchen behind the sitting-room Betty's voice could be heard singing as she moved about making preparations for the early tea-dinner which the hostess intended for the travelers.

"I am so glad you came," said Esther. "I was going to send Betty to ask you, the first moment I could spare her."

"I am very glad I came, too," replied Felix, as he shook hands with the Darieus. "This is an unexpected pleasure."

"It is the Christmas vacation," said Oriole; "I had to go somewhere, or spend my holidays alone pacing the deserted school-room. Father wanted to take me to the Fifth Avenue, so that he could show me the theaters, opera, picture-galleries, and, above all, the fashionable ladies of the avenue"—and the girl shot a laughing yet half scornful glance at her parent; "but I assured him I should die unless he allowed me a few days of fresh air and free roving. You know, there is a Gipsy strain in our blood; and I've never been used to being shut up in a boarding-school. Oh, it is frightful! Some days I felt as if suffocating. I am so glad to be here!"

She sunk down in her chair again with a sigh of content.

"Yes, she would come," murmured Darien. "Don't you think her improved, Mr. Gathorne, in spite of the terrible want of fresh air?"

Felix was no flatterer, but his smile told the father what he thought of Miss Darien.

"I am only to have her three days," said Mrs. Chaldecott. "Mr. Darien thinks that her education requires to be carried on during the holidays."

"Yes, I am to be finished," added Oriole, and again in her merry laugh was that lurking scorn. Felix felt at once that the old perfect sympathy between her and her father was destroyed. "Having grown up a child of nature, wild as the butterflies and the burdocks, I am now to be made a lady. I pity myself and my teachers! Come, Mr. Gathorne, my toes and my fingers are warm; will you go with me for a scramble 'through bush, through briar'? I can't stay in the house another minute, aunt Esther—so you must forgive me."

Taking a silk handkerchief from her jacket-pocket, she tied it over her rich dark hair, saying, with a laugh, "I can't be bothered with a

hat; it would be as bad as Absalom's hair," and then she declared herself ready.

And a wild race she led Felix through the forest and over the hills and fields. At first she avoided the house and the grounds immediately about it; but, in the course of an hour, quite suddenly she found herself in the old garden, walking its alleys, gazing at the blackened flower-stalks, the white Psyche glimmering through the lightly-falling flakes of feather snow; and in another minute she was in the summer-house, down on her knees, her face drooped on the wooden seat, sobbing as if her heart would break.

She had forgotten all about Felix. Poor fellow! he would have given the world to raise her from her knees, to smooth her flying hair, to soothe her with the story of his own love; but he knew that only a desperate repulse awaited him should he attempt it; so he wandered about by himself, discontented and wondering that Eugene should be so happy as to be thus mourned by this glorious young creature.

Presently a timid hand was laid on his arm, and great, wet, shining eyes were lifted piteously to his face.

"Come, I am ready to go back, Mr. Gathorne. How selfish I have been! To ask you to come with me and then to treat you so. There has been a winter storm, you see; but the sun shall set brightly for all that!" and she forced a gay laugh as she pointed to where the "orb of day" was burning like gold below the clouds.

Just then Mrs. Rice, peering anxiously out from under a huge hood, came into the garden.

"Oh, there you be, Mr. Gathorne. I'm desprit glad; for there's been a colored boy here waiting most an hour; here's the note he gave me to give you. Well, I declare, is that you, Miss Darien? How do you do? A-visiting Miss Chaldecott? Well, I'm right glad to see you looking so well an' handsome—ain't she, Mr. Gathorne?"

"She is, indeed, Mrs. Rice," responded Felix, heartily, as he opened a half-sheet of soiled note-paper, fastened by a piece of red wafer, and glanced at its contents.

His face changed as he read—flushed, then paled.

"Can you find your way back to the cottage alone, Miss Darien? I am afraid I must leave you at once."

"You know I can—or have, a hundred times," smiling. Then, as the thought came to her that there might be bad tidings from Eugene, she added, losing a shade of her bright bloom:

"I hope there is no bad news, Felix?"

"Not from my brother," he said, reading her thought. "If you will take this scrap of paper to Mrs. Chaldecott you will oblige me. She will be nearly as much interested in it as I am. And now, Mrs. Rice, if you will make me a cup of tea while Michael saddles my horse, I will get off as soon as possible. Good-night, Miss Darien. I will call over in the morning."

Mrs. Rice made the tea and put some eatables on a salver, greatly disappointed that the young gentleman had not confided the contents of the note; Felix hastily made a light meal, mounted the horse which Michael brought to the door, and rode away—not on the highway, but taking a bridle-path leading through lanes and fields into the wood; it was five o'clock, the sun was set, and he wanted to make five miles before it grew entirely dark.

The line which was scrawled feebly on the folded paper was this:

"Come quickly. I am dying, but I am in my senses, and must see the son of my dear, dead mother."
—DIANA.

The shadows lay deep in the thick forest as Felix urged his animal along the narrow path. His heart beat faster than usual; his brain was busy with many conjectures. The last mile he had rather to see than feel his way. At length he came out on a narrow, seldom-traveled road; the large stars of winter were shining here and there between the breaking clouds; he rode on for a few rods and dismounted before a log-hut which stood against a background of wood, yet almost directly on the wild country road. The red light of a fire and candles shining through the white curtains told him here was Diana's home.

They must have heard his horse's approach, for the door opened, as, after tying the bridle to a sapling, Felix approached the steps. A middle-aged colored woman and her husband appeared—the same ones who had had the care of old Diana for years and whom he had seen when he visited the hut last summer—and welcomed him.

"We is glad you is arrived, Massa Gathorne. She is very bad; an' she has fretted for fo' yo'

wouldn't get her. 'The minister is her' befo' yo', she wanted him for a 'liabul witness, she said. Walk right in an' warm yo'self to de fire.'

The young gentleman removed his cap and stepped forward into the large, cleanly, not uncheerful room, with its great blazing fire and its kitchen utensils glittering on the walls. He glanced toward the bed, but the dying woman was not there. She sat in a great splint-bottom rocking-chair to one side of the fire, with her feet on a stool wrapped in a quilt. She sat quite erect, turning her face toward the approaching visitor; and a remarkably fine-looking and impressive personage she appeared, even yet. Tall, of splendid, stately figure, her imposing head wrapped in a red silk turban, every movement full of a natural majesty which had always distinguished her, and had once made her pretty young mistress declare that she must be a Nubian princess—even now, blind for twenty years, and dying—Diana held her own.

"Speak!" she said, holding out her hands cold and damp with the dew of death, "let me hear the voice of little Felix—my darling boy, to save whom from the flames I lost my eyes."

"Is that so, dear nurse? I was never told," said Felix, kneeling beside her chair and pressing the cold hands in his warm ones.

"Oh, Diana, can it be you are really dying?—and I desire so to have you tell me of my mother. I know she was very fond of you—I know you were devoted, heart and soul, to her."

She passed her trembling hands over his smooth young face.

"You are beautiful—you have the Gathorne features. They tell me you came here last summer, but the cloud of fire was over my brain then and I did not know my little boy had come to see me. Now, it is all gone. I recall the past, I remember, I recognize all things—proof enough that I am dying! Yes, dear young master, your poor mother trusted Diana as she trusted no other human being. Poor, poor darling, the pet, the idol of every one!—the dearest dear of her first husband—they were brought up together, elbow-cousins, as you know—and she never had a trouble till he died—died in the first year of her marriage—you never saw your father, poor boy! And then you were born and she lived on—a widow, beautiful, young, rich—ay, she had her own fortune and yours, too, my child, for he willed her everything; and Mathew Morley learned of it, and with all the arts of Lucifer he went after my darling, nor gave her one hour's peace until he had worried her into marrying him. Then he set to work to break her heart, and he made out. He shut her up—kept her friends away—sneered, jeered at her—told her he had married her for her money—kept her down—crushed her by inches—oh, I have cursed him, out of his hearing and to his face! I was her only friend—her only protector. Where is Mr. Newcome?" asked Diana, pausing in her low, excited narration.

A person whom Felix had not previously noticed arose from a remote corner of the room and came forward—a clerical-looking person, who stated to Mr. Gathorne in an undertone that he was a minister of the Baptist persuasion, who had come at old Diana's request, to be a witness to what she might affirm, and to her being of sound mind at the time of giving her testimony.

"I am here, Diana."

"Listen to what I say and swear. Mrs. Morley made her will the day before she died. She willed everything to her own son, Felix. At her direction I put the will—with some of her letters, and a paper written for Felix to read when he should be older, and all her own family jewels, and some money of my own which was due me—in a certain box, and carried it out at midnight, after she died, and buried it in the garden, to keep it from Mathew Morley until I could place it in proper hands. The awful accident two nights later, which deprived me of my reason and left me blind and crazy, has kept me from ever taking the box from the earth where it lies hidden; and I am told that Mathew Morley forged a will, pretending his wife's fortune was left to himself; and that he had the wickedness—it was just like him!—to leave my poor Felix's money all to his own son. Oh, if I had strength to be carried to that old garden! But, I have not. I can only tell you to measure three hundred and three paces directly south in a line from the south face of the tower and you will find the box. That will be the only will Mrs. Morley ever made. The other was a forgery. Everything belongs to my boy here. And I thank God that he has given me these few hours of reason in which to right this wicked wrong. Oh, all comes back as if it were yesterday! The cloud of fire by

day, the pillar by night, no longer scorches my poor brain. I see my precious darling in her coffin, and her little son sleeping in his white bed—and the storm drives closer—the lightning flashes—the terrible thunder shakes the house—and then, oh, mercy! there is a sea of fire, and I struggle in it for those children's lives. They are safe and I leap from the window and run, in my agony, I know not where—my clothes are dropping from me in shreds of flame; but there is a brook somewhere in the forest, and I seek it, and find it and fling myself into it—Hark! What is that? Oh, glory be to the good Father, my darling, my darling!"

She grew quite still, turning her head to listen. There was indeed, a sound at the door; it opened, and into the log-hut, came Mrs. Chaldecott, white and wild, followed by the heavy steps of Zophiel Darien.

CHAPTER XXV.

WHAT FELIX HEARD.

What, if her spirit
Reëntered her cold corpse? —COLERIDGE.

To stupefy a woman's heart with anguish
Till she forgot she even was a mother. —MATURIN.

ORIOLE had walked rapidly back to the cottage, through the pale yellow light of the winter sunset, while Felix was taking his hurried tea and waiting for his horse to be brought up.

She found Mrs. Chaldecott's appetizing tea-dinner waiting to be served, and that lady disappointed because Mr. Gathorne had not returned with her; for all excuse for him the girl put in Esther's hand the note Felix had received and had asked to have given her:

"Come quickly. I am dying, but I am in my senses and must see the son of my dear dead mistress."
DIANA.

When Mrs. Chaldecott read it she turned very white and burst into tears—a most unexpected display of emotion in one so reserved and self-controlled.

"I must go, too," she cried, placing the note in Zophiel's hand. "Oh, Mr. Darien, can you find me a way to follow Felix? I must go! I must go!"

"I know where Diana lives:—perhaps I might get a couple of horses from Clough, the farmer. Can you ride, Mrs. Chaldecott?"

"Yes. I used to be quite at home in the saddle."

"I must go with you. It will be late and dark. Come, let us at least have a cup of that delicious coffee, for we will need it; there is probably no such haste that a half-hour will make much difference; then I will get the horses and accompany you. Esther, you are strangely excited," he continued, watching her trembling hands which spilled the coffee as she poured it.

"I am—I am! Oriole, my dear, I am very sorry to treat you so inhospitably; at least you need not hasten your dinner. You will be lonely; but you need have no fear, with Betty and the dog to watch with you. Do not wait up for us; there is no telling when we will return." She pressed everything upon Zophiel but ate nothing herself; however, she drank a cup of strong coffee, which braced her shaking nerves.

Seeing her agitation and anxiety to be off, Darien made but a hasty meal and set out in search of horses; as it would be several miles further to attempt to go around by the carriage-road.

In less than half an hour he was back with two tolerable animals; Mrs. Chaldecott, waiting on the step, sprung onto the one assigned her, and they galloped away in the pale afterglow of the sunset, into the heart of the leafless woods, the lady urging her horse to such speed that Darien had hard work to keep up with her.

"Ten to one but my long-cherished suspicions about Esther will prove true," he muttered to himself, as he spurred his animal to keep with in sight of that flying figure, slender and erect as a girl's. "Stranger things have happened! How she must have secretly scorned my presumption in asking her to be my wife!"

On and on, through the twilight deepening into night, fled Esther on the powerful horse which carried her as if she were but a feather's weight; on and on, until she pulled bridle rein before the hut by the roadside, when she flung herself down before Zophiel could come to her assistance, and stood outside that humble door, pressing her hand to her palpitating heart, while she struggled for composure.

It was then that Diana had turned uneasily, and with a strange joy lighting up her still comely face had cried out:

"My darling! My darling!"

Then the door had opened and the two visitors came in.

"Diana!"

The low, sweet cry thrilled through the room. Mrs. Chaldecott had thrown aside her hat, and was kneeling on the hearth by the chair of the dying woman; she had the already cold hands in her own soft white ones, and was kissing them.

"Do you know me, Diana? Do you know my voice? If you do, testify before these who I am, that it cannot be denied afterward. Do you know me, Diana?"

"Am I dead? Am I in heaven, already, with the blessed spirits, that her spirit should come first to welcome her poor old black servant?" asked the old nurse, in an awe-struck whisper, stretching out a hand to feel the upturned face near her.

"No, no, dear Diana, you are not with the blessed dead; you still live, and so do I. Speak my name, Diana."

"It is my own young mistress, Eysyth Gathorne—Eysyth Morley, when she died—come back to life! Oh, that I could have my sight for one little minute, to behold the sweet face of my young lady!"

"Young no longer—worn and faded, Diana, with trouble and time. Yes, it is your Eysyth who speaks to you. I have been here a hundred times before—as your good relatives can testify—though they dreamed not of my true name; nor did my poor nurse recognize me."

"Ah, Diana's wits were all astray; the cloud of fire was over me. I have always believed in miracles—is this not one?—that my darling should be dead, yet here speaking to me!"

"No miracle, in one sense, dear nurse; yet, in another, surely one. Diana, when they thought me dead—when they laid me out in my coffin—I was only in a horrible trance! The agony of those slow hours dragging on into days, when I lay there helpless, hearing every word which was spoken, knowing every preparation made for my burial—ah, Heaven! I dream it all over again, night after night. Never were my senses more acutely wrought to terrible keenness than when I lay there unable to move a finger, to raise an eyelash. Let me prove it to you, Diana! I knew when my husband came into the room that second night and demanded of you to give up the jewels and the will. I heard every word—your refusal, his threats."

"The Lord have mercy on my soul!" murmured the old nurse.

"I am certain I should have continued in my trance-like fainting-fit, and would have been buried alive the next day, as was arranged, had not Providence, Diana, rescued me—not by what you would call a miracle, perhaps, but through the operation of natural laws. When that fearful thunderbolt struck the house, the electric shock did what my own frantic will could not do—freed the awful thrall that bound me!—in a moment I was sitting up in my coffin—the next, I had sprung from it, and seeing the room in a blaze I rushed into my dressing-room, caught a garment hanging there, threw it about me, and went out into the corridor. Others were there by that time; but I passed unperceived in the excitement; as the garment I had taken by chance proved, happily, to be a waterproof cloak, in which I wrapped myself completely. I fled down the stairs out into the storm—and then—I thought of my little Felix, asleep, and my room adjoining all in a blaze. I would have rushed back into that sea of fire, but just then, looking up, I saw you, good Diana, lowering both my Felix and little Eugene from the balcony. Alas, your dress was in a blaze—I wrung my hands, you leaped over the balcony and fell heavily, but struggled up and ran, your clothing dropping from you in shreds, and I pursuing, trying to overtake and help you!—here the speaker's voice melted into tears—she paused to clasp down the sob in her throat.

"Then it was you, my child, who dragged me out of the water and kissed my poor, scorched face! Ah, I thought you was a spirit, and what with that, and the pain, I went raving mad."

"It was your poor Eysyth, Diana. I led you to some of your kin, who lived there in the wood—led you to their door, and then I ran away; for a desperate resolve had taken possession of me never—never to let Mathew Morley know or suspect that his ill-used wife was not dead, and her very body consumed in the fire, as he thought her. I had no money—no clothes

but my grave-clothes and that creak, out of which I fashioned a dress—no friends that I dared appeal to, for fear they would betray the fact of my existence—but I would not go back to live with Mr. Morley—no, not even for the dear boon of being with my boy!”

As she uttered those two magic words “my boy,” a low cry broke from the very heart of Felix Gathorne:

“Mother!”

At the sound Mrs. Morley dropped Diana's hand and sprung to her feet; half shyly, like a maiden who loves and doubts, she looked toward Felix, and her eyes shone like stars, but she did not rush to him—only stood and gazed, faltering and smiling.

“Can you learn to think of me as your mother?” she asked, timidly.

He took her in his arms, kissing her pale forehead very tenderly.

“If you could dream how sweet it is for me to gain a mother, you would not ask. How is it possible you could be near, with me, and yet your heart not betray the secret in your voice and eyes?”

“Long years of sternest sorrows have given me great self-control, Felix. Oh, I have pined to clasp you in my arms—to call you my boy!”

“Yes, but—Eugene?” stammered he, hardly knowing how to, or meaning to, put the question of property; yet, feeling it strange that his own parent—the undoubted owner of the whole Morley moneys and estates, should have remained by, the nearly four years since Mathew Morley's death and dishonest will, without putting forth an effort to take her own, or to give her son the benefit of it.

“I know, dear Felix, you will think me weak and foolish. I have spent all this time in trying to find my own will—buried in the garden by Diana to keep it from the destroyer.”

“Ay, ay,” interrupted the dying old nurse, half-wandering again, after that lucid interval, “ay, ay, she knows—

Three times one hundred and three
From the tower bell to the red-rose tree;
Diana's riddle is riddled there—
She that is dead shall name the heir.”—

not dead—not dead. She that lives shall name her son the heir.”

“I was afraid, my dear son,” went on Mrs. Morley, again kneeling by Diana's side and chafing the death-cold hands—“afraid that Eugene and his lawyers would deny my identity—laugh my story to scorn—make me out an impostor of the boldest type—and, what would be worse, accuse you of criminal connivance. They may do it yet; but I think not: I think the testimony of this faithful creature, before these witnesses, will aid in securing my re-establishment. Diana recognized my voice as soon as I spoke to her. Dear nurse and faithful friend, have you any doubt of who I am?” she asked, gently, fondling the cold hands.

“No doubt. I felt you, my dear young mistress, before you came in the door. I am blind, but I know my Eysyth. And have you not told me what took place between Mr. Morley and me, when there was no other soul present but you, lying there in your coffin?” and then her tremulous voice, rich even in these its last cadences, began to sing:

“Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face.”

One or two of her friends joined in the hymn; but before another verse was sung, the dying woman, still sitting erect in her chair, called out loudly—“Eysyth!” and groping about with her hands, sunk back in her seat, dead.

“Oh, Diana,” sobbed her mistress, “intelligent, noble, heroic, faithful, was there ever another servant like unto you?”

Zophiel Darien aided in carrying Diana to the bed, where Mrs. Morley closed her eyes and folded her arms over her bosom.

“I have little money about me, Felix,” she whispered to her son, “can you lend me some to give them to insure a decent burial?”

When all was done that they could do the three mounted their horses, and, by the light of a late-rising moon, went back over the tedious five miles to the cottage.

Felix never forgot that weird ride through the winter woods, with the black shadows of the leafless branches lying thick over the bridle-path. He was dazed; almost he believed that he dreamed. This lady behind whom he rode, his mother! Mrs. Chaldecott, the gentle, the reserved, who had always attracted him—this dweller in a woodland cottage—the proud lady of Gathorne Towers and Morley Beeches, whose brief, unhappy history had already become a legend! Truly, he must be in a dream!

And he, Felix Gathorne, the proven heir of all these broad acres over which they were riding! He—the “poor relation” whom young Morley's guests scarce gave a thought—the possessor in prospect of unlimited splendor!

And Eugene!—what would he say and do?

And Miss St. Mark—what would she do?

And Oriole—would it make a difference with her?

“There is no time to be lost,” he thought, “if this is not a dream, then Eugene must know—and his bride-elect must know—the truth, before the marriage-day.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

It must separate us!—TALFOURD.

“She hath taken flight none know where.”

A GREAT fire was blazing and sputtering on the hall hearthstone of Morley Beeches. A fine dinner was being prepared in the kitchen. It was four o'clock of the day after Diana's death, and nearly dark at that hour, for the days were at their very shortest. It still threatened snow which had not fallen; the world and sky were dun-colored; the thermometer was falling below freezing-point.

Michael had gone to the station for Mr. Morley; as Felix had telegraphed, early that morning, asking him to come to the Beeches immediately on important business. Felix was standing before the hall-fire, dreading to hear the sound, soon to be expected, of approaching wheels. He was alone. His mother and Darien, and the family lawyer, were to come to the house at seven; but Felix had asked that his brother might have his dinner and an hour's rest, before the business was broached—the very unpleasant business, for Eugene, to hear which he had been sent for.

“I am actually miserable about it,” said the young man to himself. “Eugene enjoys everything so much—it is such a pleasure for him to be rich—he spends money so magnificently—that it seems little less than barbarous for me to step in at this late hour and deprive him of everything! Poor little mother! she ought to have come forward the day Mathew Morley died, and then Eugene would not have been so cruelly disappointed. She did very wrong to let us go our separate ways without declaring herself. There is plenty of truth in what she says about the difficulty of establishing her identity, the danger of being thwarted as an impostor, and the other difficulties she brings forward; yet, since she was conscious of the truth, she ought not to have been so timid. It only shows how she must have suffered to become so unnerved—so afraid to confront such obstacles as there were, poor, dear, unhappy little lady! Well, I trust her trials are over, at least; yet I cannot help feeling like a thief and a robber, to meet my brother with such a story. On the eve of his marriage, too! Ah! there comes the wagon and—yes, Eugene. I never felt so mean in all my life!”

The clear dark skin of Felix was suffused with an actual blush as he hurried out on the piazza to meet his brother. Eugene sprung out of the wagon and came up the steps as happy, as careless, as handsome and brilliant, as a man could be.

“Well, old boy, this is something of a nuisance,” he said, as he grasped the hand of his welcomer, “calling me out into the country at this time of year, and only fourteen days to my wedding, too! What's up? Isn't the work going to suit you? I know your taste is critical.”

“You shall see the improvements for yourself, Eugene. I think there is still light enough to go over the drawing-rooms. After that we will have a cosy little dinner—just we two; then, business.”

“All right, Felix. Though I'm puzzled to know what you are after. Seems to me you are not looking entirely well,” he added, scrutinizing the dark beauty of his companion's face, where the troubled expression betrayed mental anxiety. “You are not going to tell me that you are in love—or engaged—or anything of that sort?” with a sudden uncomfortable pang, as he thought of Oriole Darien—albeit, he expected to wed another girl in two weeks' time.

“I have no such good news as that of being engaged ought to be,” responded the other; but he made no explanations; and after Eugene had divested himself of overcoat and gloves and stood a moment before the cheerful fire, they betook themselves to the drawing-room to glance at the work which had been done there.

“It soon grew too dark for that, however, and they strolled into the library, where everything had been made as pleasant as possible.

“The old place is not so stupid in winter, after all,” remarked Eugene, settling comfortably into a big easy-chair before the hearth and glancing about him. “This is as cosy as possible. If Irene had any domestic tastes I should expect to spend a good deal of my time here, even in winter. I don't mind saying to you, old fellow, that I have a growing impression my princess is marrying me for my money. I discovered—quite accidentally—the other day, that old St. Mark lost almost everything before he died, and that it has taken their last dollar to provide the wedding trousseau—not that I care for the fact that my bride is dowless!—goodness knows I have enough for both!—but I don't fancy the deceit about their means the two ladies have practiced.”

Felix walked to the window and back again; there was a lump in his throat which made him hoarse when he spoke—which was not in answer to his brother's confidence, but on some trivial subject.

“You are not very sympathetic,” said Eugene, a little hurt.

“Yes, I am—I am; but—you don't know!—wait until after dinner,” stammered Felix.

“I do believe he is afraid I will fling up the match, yet, and win my bird Oriole away from him! I would to Heaven I could—honorably!” and Eugene fell into a brown study before the fire, while the early twilight deepened, the branches of a rose bush, outside, rattled against the pane, the great ruby coals dropped with a light click, and his companion walked slowly up and down without interrupting his reverie; until finally Mrs. Rice came in to drop the curtains, renovate the fire and say that dinner was on the table.

A very choice little dinner it was, brightened by a vase of roses which Felix had sent to the village florist to obtain; Eugene's idea about his lady-love's selfishness did not appear to have spoiled his appetite; he ate well, chatting away lightly about the opera, the new singers, the last play, his trip to Florida, not noticing that his vis-a-vis at the hospitable board scarcely touched his food, or responded to his desultory chit-chat. When they left the table the people Felix was expecting had arrived and been shown into the library.

Some one else was there, too, whom he did not expect—Oriole, who had refused to remain with Betty at the cottage, saying that she had some testimony of her own to add to theirs.

The shining of those great, dark eyes was the first thing Eugene saw when he reentered the room; their light pierced his heart with a sweet, sharp pain; a thousand memories of those blissful, stolen hours of the summer almost overcame him.

“Why did you not tell me Miss Darien was to be here?” he whispered to Felix. “The sight of her has set my pulses to flying at the rate of a hundred a minute. She is lovelier than ever.”

“I did not know she was to be here this evening; although aware that she was visiting at this lady's cottage. Eugene, I have a great and painful surprise for you. Dear brother, I hope you will believe me when I say that it makes me unhappy to think that you must lose by my gain. This lady, whom you have heard of as Mrs. Chaldecott—

“Ah!” cried Eugene, with a sudden, sharp accent, like a cry—“I know what you are going to tell me!—the will has been found!” and he looked over at Oriole almost with reproach; and, pale and agitated, sunk into a chair.

“Not the will, Mr. Morley,” spoke up his legal adviser, “but the maker of the will! We have an extraordinary announcement to make. This lady, whom you have known under an assumed name, asserts herself to be Mrs. Morley, your father's second wife, whom all believed dead and buried twenty years ago.”

“Asserts herself—” murmured Eugene, glancing at her, suspiciously.

“And has proved it, my dear boy. I am sorry—we are all sorry for you—but there is no need of fighting the evidence—it is too strong—there is nothing for it but for you to resign to their owner the moneys and estates your father pretended to have inherited from Eysyth Gathorne Morley. Mrs. Morley is here to claim her own; Felix has found a mother, and you have lost a fortune—that is the long and short of it. It is rough upon you; but you are no coward, Eugene, to shrink from bearing disappointment; and your step-mother, I know, will be more than just—she will be generous.”

“Yes, dear Eugene,” said Mrs. Morley, coming up to him, and taking his limp, cold hand, “I loved you almost as fondly as my own boy when you two were little together—I look upon you as my son, still; my very own son, dear Eugene; and, as such, you shall fare as Felix fares:

your allowance shall be the same as his while I live, and at my death the property shall be equally divided between you two; this house is still your home, as it is my son's home; and your bride shall be as welcome to it as I can make her."

His bride! Eugene started, as the vision of Irene, haughty and hard to please, coming to Morley Beeches, not as the mistress, but the daughter and dependent—came before him; involuntarily his glance sought Oriole's, but she was looking down.

There was a moment's fierce struggle with his own pride and disappointment; then, his careless but generous nature rose superior to envy or bitter humiliation; he looked up into the gentle, loving eyes of Mrs. Morley, and a smile came into his own blue ones as he answered her:

"You are very good to me, and I am very grateful. Felix deserves his good luck, and I shall try to be glad that he has it," then, after a moment's hesitation: "This is, indeed, a great surprise and marvel. I am quite ready to listen to an explanation"—after which there was a long conversation, in which everything was gone over, more fully than it had been so far done even to Felix.

"My father seems to have been a scoundrel," remarked Eugene, rather bitterly; for, softened the truth as she might before his son, the persecuted wife could not rightly explain herself without revealing her own martyrdom to the systematic cruelty of Mathew Morley.

"He was!" spoke up the old lawyer, sternly. "I knew that always. Thank God, you are not at all like him, body or mind, Eugene! So, that is enough of him! There is no use in hurting your feelings any more by reference to his misdeeds. I dare say we shall have great amusement in organizing a grand hunt for that box old Diana hid so over-securely! Eh, my children?"

Then Eugene looked at Oriole, who, with flushing cheeks and lowered lids, confessed to having found the hidden treasure so long ago as last June. She said she had read the will, but could not make up her mind to avow her discovery because—because—

"Never mind the reason, Miss Darien," said Felix, pitying her embarrassment. "I dare say you thought affairs were better as they stood."

"But I told Mr. Morley before he left here last fall," she went on.

"Yes, she told me," admitted Eugene, coloring deeply under their looks of surprise. "She gave me the jewels; but the papers were missing—among them, the will. How did I know there had been a will? Miss Darien said so, and said she had it; but, when I besought her to bring it to me that I might show it to my brother, she could not produce it. I admit that I should have told Felix Miss Darien had declared there was a will in his favor; I meant to—some time. I did, indeed. You will admit it was hard to give up everything on an uncertainty!"

"Some one stole the papers from the box," added Oriole, hastily, wishing to divert attention from poor Eugene's fault. "I never could even guess who did it."

"I think I can tell you," spoke up Zephiah, his deep-set eyes lighting up. "Something occurred a day or two before Mrs. St. Mark and her daughter left Morley Beeches, which has always been a mystery to me. I have never spoken of it before. I had been away, and returned home earlier than I expected—about eight o'clock of the evening. My door was locked—Betty evidently being away—but the key was not in the place where I had told her always to leave it. I stood there, puzzled what to do, when I heard the door being softly unlocked from the inside. I thought my daughter—who was then staying with Mrs. Chaldecott—had come home for some of her clothes; but, as there was some—hard feeling—between us at that time, I considered that it would be pleasanter for her not to see me, so I stepped back in the shadow of a rose-bush and remained quiet. The door slowly and cautiously opened and a woman came out. I could tell, at once, that it was neither Oriole nor Mrs. Chaldecott. I was very curious about it. She fastened the door and placed the key under the stone, glanced about her, and moved away in the direction of the mansion. I followed, at a discreet distance. Quite certain that I recognized the tall, slender figure, I was desirous to be fully satisfied; and verily, when the lady came under the light of the two lamps on either side the steps, I had a full look at her face, and it was—Miss St. Mark's."

Eugene sprang to his feet as if he would have

knocked the speaker down. But, at that, Oriole gave a little cry.

"I understand it all," she said. "I had told Miss St. Mark about the will the night they thought Mr. Morley was dying. I heard her say to her mother that she would not marry him except that he was rich—that she was going to his bedside to persuade him to leave her a rich widow; I was so outraged by the cool way she talked, that I followed and told her my proofs that Mr. Morley was not the true heir. Of course she went to the Lodge afterward to search for the will! It was she who took it from the box—and destroyed it! Doubtless she felt quite safe to marry Mr. Morley after she had destroyed the will!"

A silence fell upon the little company who pitied Eugene Morley from their hearts. Was it not hard to lose fortune and faith in woman-kind at one fell blow? Eugene sat quite pale and still for a little while; then he looked up, and something resolute shone in his handsome blue eyes.

"If it is true that Miss St. Mark has done this—and prizes me only for the fortune I no longer possess—it will be happy for her that she learns my loss in time. At least, it will prove her—you will admit that! If she loves me, and will marry me still, I shall keep my promise to her; if she wishes to try her luck at a better match, I shall give her the opportunity. Until she has decided for herself I prefer to hear no one speak ill of her."

As he said this his manly glance did not falter—no, not even when it met those soft, dark, glowing eyes fixed on him with such a look of mingled hope and fear, despair and love, as betrayed the whole foolish, impulsive, passionate heart of the girl who worshiped him.

"I should think even Miss St. Mark might be satisfied with half of what you believed your fortune, my brother," said Felix, affectionately; "and that much my mother's promise assures you. I have been going over everything, to pass the time here, this winter; and I find the Western property has more than doubled in value; that, in fact, our possessions have reached a point where they cannot help growing, even if left alone. Why need there be any trouble?"

"At least," answered the other, after a pause, "I will test Irene's love. I have doubted it—here is the opportunity to

"Put it to the touch,
To win or lose it all."

I will tell her this marvelous story of our mother's return to us, of her claim on every dollar—but I will not tell her, dear mother, of your generous offer—not at first. If she loves me as a woman should love him she consents to marry, here will be her chance to come out as a heroine of the first class—with a melancholy smile—"to avow her contempt for mere riches—her undying devotion to her lover! If she cares only for that wealth I shall seem to her to have lost, then she will easily invent some way, even yet, of slipping out of her promise. Ah, how unfortunate!" he cried, suddenly, half-rising from his seat; "the invitations were to go out to-day! This will complicate matters most awkwardly—provided Irene desires her freedom. I would it had come a little sooner—this strange change."

"Do not make yourself unhappy, Eugene," whispered Mrs. Morley, sitting by him and taking his hand. "Miss St. Mark may prove all that is noble—or, the cards may not have gone out to-day; and you will see her to-morrow." But Eugene was, naturally, in a restless mood, with the bewildering revelations made him and the uncertainty of how Irene would receive the bad tidings. Yet, through all his excitement he felt a deep satisfaction in knowing that Oriole Darien was in the same room; while occasionally his heart gave a wild throb at a thought that would intrude—the sweet, glad thought that if Irene proved false, he would be at liberty to—woo and win some lovelier, softer, sweeter, dearer child, who would love him for himself alone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A BIRD IN THE HAND.

I gave you up to go your way,
Oh you, whom I adored!
Love hath no ties, but Destiny
Shall cut them with a sword.

—SIDNEY MORSE.

MISS ST. MARK had contrived to partake of a delicious little luncheon in company with her mother and the Misses Carlington, after that call from Señor Rolando, and was just composing herself for a siesta on the sofa, when, after

a hasty knock, Eugene Morley came in—unexpectedly, for Irene had not looked for him before that evening or the next morning.

He was looking ill and care-worn, and there was a perceptible tremble in his voice as he greeted his fiancée. The kiss which Irene gave him was warmer than she meant; for she could not well help feeling sorry, in any case, to see that bright, handsome face clouded; and—for a few moments—she pitied him. Then she asked herself—"Why do I feel regret for him? He is still far better off than almost any other of my acquaintance. Half of the Morley fortune would satisfy most people. Poor, dear Eugene! you never appeared so fascinating to me as now! Would the fabulous gold of that yellow West Indian repay me for the sacrifice, should I give you up?—No, no. That impertinent girl was right. Now is the time to prove my devotion to you."

She drew him to a seat beside her on the sofa. "What is the matter, Eugene? You look ill."

"I am not ill, my love, but I am in trouble. Not that I care for myself; but I dread the effect on you, Irene; I fear you will be deeply disappointed; and I want to say now, before anything else, that if my bad news makes you feel a wish to be free from your promise to be my wife in a few days, I admit that you have a right to so decide."

"Why, your news must be very bad news, indeed," remarked Irene, smiling.

Then, in a burst of excited feeling, he told her what it was, and was deeply surprised to find how calmly, almost laughingly, she received it. Had he mistaken her character? Done injustice to her womanly nature? She was looking up at him with those lovely blue eyes unclouded, saying, cheerfully—not giving a hint that she had been apprised of all this before:

"Is this your terrible news? Well, Eugene, if Mrs. Morley keeps her promise, and divides equally between her own son and you, I don't see that we need to starve. There have always been rumors about the will, you know; it is better to know the truth, now; I, for one, am willing the melancholy Felix should have his share. Quite romantic, and like a book, is it not? Now, if Felix would only marry the gardener's daughter, we should be a happy family."

"Never mind her," said Eugene, flushing slightly. "If you love me truly enough to allow this to make no difference with you, Irene, I think our prospects of happiness are satisfactory. Indeed, you take a heavy weight from my mind, my darling; I am grateful to you for the way you have borne this blow,"—and then he, in his turn, felt remorse that he had been conscious of a remote hope that Irene would break the fetters which bound them together, and so leave him free to follow that other foolish, fond inclination.

This lurking consciousness made him a very devoted lover that afternoon. There was plenty to talk about, and the wedding-dress had to be viewed; it was settled that the cards were to go out the next morning; and Eugene, putting all thoughts of Oriole far away, resolved to be a good and true husband to this noble girl who had remained so devoted to him; while the "noble girl" was secretly consoling herself with two wise proverbs:

"A half a loaf is better than no bread,"

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

The Señor had not actually proposed; so it might be madness for her to jilt Mr. Morley on a possible uncertainty.

If we could read the minds of many fair-brides would not thoughts and motives as selfish be found, where the lover fondly believes that only pure affection has room to live?

Not thus was love tempered by prudence in the passionate heart of Oriole Darien. With her, poor child, love was all. When she had sat there in the Morley library with the others, and saw the shadow on Eugene Morley's face on learning that he was disinherited, her love had risen to something better than the mad, unreasoning passion of a romantic girl. It had turned to devotion. She despised herself for having felt glad that his disappointment would bring him nearer to her. She longed to serve him—even if by so doing she sacrificed herself, utterly. And so the foolish fancy came to her that, perhaps, if she could see Miss St. Mark first, she could persuade her to be true to her lover in spite of his losses. And she had slipped away from Morley Beeches, alone, and walked to the distant station in time to catch the eight o'clock train to the city; had gone to the Clarendon and waited until the ladies came from the opera; and then, alone with her rival, she had told her how affairs were going at Morley Beeches, begging Irene not to

add to Mr. Morley's bitter mortification, by refusing to be his wife; painting the generosity of Mrs. Morley in the most glowing colors, and adding her conviction that whatever that lady promised she would more than fulfill.

When Irene mockingly asked her why she had come on such an errand, she had meekly admitted that it was because she loved him so well that she only wanted him to be happy; that she had given up her own wild, foolish thoughts and wishes, and only prayed for his welfare; and she had believed that by coming first, and persuading Miss St. Mark to see the bright side of the picture she could reconcile her to it before her lover spoke to her about it, and so save him any further disappointment.

"He would not allow them to predict that it would make any difference with you, Miss St. Mark, so I thought I would tell you what faith he had in you, that you might be proud to prove yourself worthy of it."

Irene had laughed in her sarcastic way.

"You are a very singular girl, Miss Darien, as perhaps you are aware. Your unconventional way of doing things is amusing. More than one young lady would not care to be told, by a girl as pretty as you are, how much you adore the gentleman she expects to marry; but, in your case, one excuses you, on the ground of your ignorance. It is too late for you to go away from the hotel to-night; you can share my maid's bed. I shall not care to see you again in the morning—but, if it will content you to hear me say it, I may assure you that I have no present intention of changing my arrangements."

"I am very glad," Oriole had answered her, simply. "I can bear your contempt, and even your amusement—they make no difference with me—now that you know of his loss and are still true to Mr. Morley. I need not be told that I am not like other girls. I have lived in a solitary world of my own all my life. I know only a few people, and those I love I love with all my heart, and those I hate I hate with all my heart. I cannot be Mr. Morley's wife, but I shall be his friend. I would walk around the globe to do him some small service. I do not forget that he was nearly killed for a fault of which he was innocent. Again, I say, I am glad you are going to fulfill your word to him."

"How those great dark eyes of hers glowed when she asserted that she would walk around the globe to do him some small service!" mused Irene, after she had dismissed her strange visitor by calling her maid to "share her room with this young woman." "I don't wonder Eugene came near being infatuated! She's quite the prettiest young creature I ever saw. I must marry him, if only to keep him from her. Imagine the elegant Mr. Morley, of Morley Beeches, playing at love in a cottage with his garden's daughter!"

And it was this hateful jealousy which became a powerful motive to keep Irene from discharging Eugene. Never was a scheming woman in greater doubt what move to make next than was the bride-elect on that day of Mr. Morley's return. We know the encouragement she had contrived to give the Señor; yet to Eugene she appeared fond and true.

Meantime, Oriole, not once regretting her visit, but lonely and very sad, had returned by an early train, and getting off at the village had seen Eugene stepping onto one going in the opposite direction. She drew down her veil that he might not recognize her.

"Good-by, my love, good-by!" she cried, silently, in her heart.

Zophiel Darien was standing on the platform. He had come down to the station with Mr. Morley and was to drive the wagon back.

Darien had had something to say privately to his former employer—the man who had made his daughter so unhappy—the man he had once nearly killed in a sudden fury—and he had said it as they came along; it was something like this:

"Mr. Morley, I have a good deal of money, and nothing would please me more than to make it useful to you. You are going to be married and go on a long journey. If you need funds, to almost any amount, I will consider it a favor if you will only come to me."

And Eugene had thanked him very cordially and earnestly, not greatly surprised—for he knew that Darien had saved money and put it at interest; and thinking his "funds, to almost any amount," meant the loan of a few hundred dollars—and had said that Mrs. Morley had insisted on his not changing his arrangements in any way, but to call on his banker in his own name for the present. Oriole had seen the two men shake hands at parting, and the sight had given her pleasure.

"Father, can I ride back with you?"

"Child! Where do you come from? Mrs. Chal—Morley would not tell me; I suppose it is all right since she approved."

"I think it is right enough, father; but I am tired," and she looked so, indeed, as he lifted her into the wagon, though she smiled faintly. "I don't mind telling you I have been to see Miss St. Mark, and that—they will be married—and how glad I am. You and I must be friends again, father, as we used to be—dearer friends than ever; and I do not think I shall ever again give you so much anxiety. You are all I have in the world, and I am all you have. Let us find a little home somewhere—away from here, father—and never again be separated for a day. I don't think I care to go back to school."

"I don't care to have you, daughter," answered he, in a voice hoarse with emotion. "I shall not want you away from me, now that I have my little girl back again; yet, it may be best for a few weeks or months, while I look for a home that will please us. However, Mrs. Morley is anxious to have you stay with her at the Beeches. She is fond of you, and quite willing to go on with your lessons for the sake of your society."

"It will be harder for us to begin to try to forget—there," murmured Oriole, very low and faintly.

"Then my little girl must go away," he said, tenderly; and they were silent for some time, as the horses flew along the frozen road.

Oriole got out at the Lodge, for something she had left there, after which she walked slowly and thoughtfully up to the great house, for Mrs. Morley was there now instead of at the cottage, and it was understood between them that she was to come there on her return. Dapple admitted her and told her she would find Mrs. Morley in the library; so she hurried on, and only lightly tapping at the door, opened it and went in.

Mother and son were standing near the fire, their faces toward it, talking so earnestly that they remained unaware of her presence.

"God knows how glad I am to have a mother!" Felix was saying. "But, as to the rest, I tell you truly, mother mine, I would gladly give back all to my brother, and be again 'only a poor relation,' if by so doing I could win the love of Oriole Darien."

Oriole heard it and shrunk back.

The next minute a sudden light shone in her great lustrous eyes; she was so lonely, and here was a mother and a lover if she would but have them.

"Give me time—to forget," she cried out, and they turned and saw her standing there, so beautiful, looking at them in piteous entreaty.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"A GREAT ENCHANTRESS YOU MAY BE."

Young Jamie lo'ed me well and he sought me for his bride;

But saving a crown he had naething else beside.

—LINDSAY.

"It is easy enough to trace the resemblance now," said Felix, standing with his mother before her portrait, painted in her lovely youth. "I have often puzzled over the something in Mrs. Chaldecott's face which drew me to her and gained my affection and interest; but, truly, I am honest enough to confess, Madame Morley, that this black velvet dress and point-lace give effect to your good looks! Which reminds me!—how about the Gathorne diamonds? You know Eugene has had them reset and presented to his bride."

"Ay, I have been thinking about it. Eugene's bride must not have those jewels; they belonged to my mother—and my mother's mother, some of them—and to my own dear son they must descend, when I am done with them. They have far more than their money value to me; and to you belongs the privilege of gracing your wife with them some day. I must write to Eugene about them immediately; for the wedding comes off in three days. It will be a little awkward; but I shall send him a check for the purchase of other handsome ones; and, although Irene may be vexed, she must see the justice of the demand and yield them gracefully."

"Don't write, mother; since we are going to town to-morrow to remain until after the wedding, you can explain 'by word of mouth' more kindly, I think."

"You are right, Felix. And I will ask Irene to accept some one of the jewels as a bridal present from me. Poor Oriole! I don't like going off for several days and leaving her here

alone. She will do too much thinking; and she is already much too melancholy."

"Mother, do you believe I can ever win her love?"

"Time works wonders, Felix dear. I can only repeat what she says—'give her time to forget'—or—give you time to forget! You may be mistaken in the feeling you have for her. She is exquisitely beautiful—I admit that—and has many other charms; but I cannot but feel she would be better mated with some gay person like Eugene than with you, my grave and earnest boy! No, I still hope to see some nobler, grander woman my son's wife."

"Some daughter of the gods divinely fair."

Not that I am not very fond of Oriole; she is enchanting in her way; but—I confess it—I am very ambitious for my boy!" and she half-laughed, half-sighed, as she glanced up at him proudly.

The next day Oriole found herself alone in the great house with only the servants.

"I am so sorry to leave you without company, my dear. Is there no friend of yours at school for whom I can send to spend the time of our absence with you?" Mrs. Morley had asked before going away; and Oriole had declared her preference for being left solitary.

"My father will be out to see me once or twice during the time," she said.

Zophiel Darien appeared to have important business in the city, but not even his daughter understood what it could be. He went in on the same train with Mrs. Morley and her son; after arriving in town they lost sight of him. Rooms had been secured in the same hotel with the St. Marks and there Felix and his mother stopped, awaiting the wedding-day.

Irene received Mrs. Morley very sweetly. If she married Eugene it behooved her to make herself agreeable to his step-mother, who now held the purse and had all the favors to confer. The very evening of her arrival Esther Morley took the bride-elect aside to explain to her as kindly as possible that Eugene's presents of jewelry must be returned, as they were the family jewels of the Gathorne and entirely her property.

"Select some one of the pieces, Irene," she added, affectionately, "as a gift from me. You shall not be greatly the loser: Eugene shall go to-morrow and select you some handsome diamonds; but these are heirlooms from which I cannot part."

Irene listened in silent anger.

"Very well," was her short reply. "Since you claim them, Mrs. Morley, I shall of course give them up. I dare say it will be so with everything now; the very bread we put in our mouths will be yours. I confess, I hardly like the situation," and rising abruptly she retired from the private parlor where they were to her own bedroom, where she walked hurriedly about, her eyes burning blue fire, her pearly teeth biting savagely at her trembling under lip.

"What is the matter?" asked her mother, coming to see what kept her.

"Matter enough, mother! And quite too much! I see my position plainly enough. I am to be a beggar, fed by the bounty of that woman! That is what 'my splendid catch' has proved to be. I must ask for what I want, and drop a courtesy when I get it and say, 'Thank you, madam, how kind you are!' It is intolerable—intolerable!"

"Be calm, Irene. Do not work yourself into such a passion. We must make the best of things. It is too late now to do otherwise. We are spending our last dollar. There is no time to waste in looking for a better party. And think of the scandal of it!—breaking off, after the wedding-cards are out! Come, come, don't be a fool, daughter! You need be no one's slave. You have tact and wit enough to twist 'that woman'—as you call her—around your finger. You can get all you want out of her, if you flatter her a little. Of course, now I wish to goodness you were going to marry Señor Rolando—a magnificent match that would be, indeed! However, there is no use or sense in mourning over what might have been; it is too late."

"Too late?" echoed Irene, coming to a pause in her hurried walk about the room. "Too late? Mamma, it is not yet too late!"

Her mother stared at her in surprise. Irene returned her look with one full of subtle speculation. Her hands were locked before her, a red spot began to burn in either cheek.

"I can marry the señor to-morrow, if I so will, mamma. It would make a sensation—yet, what do I care for that? I should not be

here to be annoyed by it; he would take me away; I should be his queen—not a beggar asking alms of a step-mother! Why, the Señor counts his fortune by millions!—he adores the ground my foot presses! It is true he reminds me of an ape—that he is repulsive to me many times—that I adore my handsome, my bonny Eugene.—Oh, mamma, I am very fond of Eugene, after all!” and she sunk into a chair and bowed her fair face in her hands.

“So am I,” murmured Mrs. St. Mark. “He is like a son to me. Come, Irene, let us make the best of things! Mrs. Morley will be good to you.”

“Do you know, mamma, I am to give up all those superb diamonds?”

“No? My poor child, is this possible?”

“Yes. It proves who is to be mistress now. Do you think, with my temper and my ambition I can endure a *second* position?”

“This is trying, my poor dear! I know not how to advise you.”

“If I were not such a fool as to really care for him!” murmured the bride-elect. “But, I do—more than I thought. I can’t bear the idea that some other girl will win him, if I give him up.”

“Well, you cannot remain here deliberating. Since you love him, Irene, I advise you to go on with the programme. Come; they will wonder what is detaining us.” She drew her daughter up by the hand and led her back to their friends.

The Señor’s servant knocked at the door and left a lovely bouquet of pink roses, fringed with fern, and a small package, with the compliments of his master. Irene opened the package with eager fingers. In a rich casket—which was itself a work of art—lay a necklace of diamonds and pearls, as exquisite as it must have been costly—a glorious bridal present indeed! She gave a cry of delight; but no one saw what was written on the card which lay, with the gift, in the casket. Irene read that hastily and thrust it in her pocket, saying, with assumed carelessness:

“From Señor Rolando, as you might know. None other of my acquaintances could afford such a present.”

She seemed curiously restless and excited the remainder of the evening; the usual faint pink color in her fair cheeks had deepened to damask, while her blue eyes glittered under their half-closed lids. She chatted nervously, she laughed frequently—was so unlike her cold, scornful self that Mrs. Morley watched her with keen observation.

The following morning Eugene desired her to go with him and his adopted mother to select the diamonds which were to take the place of the Gathorne gems. She surprised him by declining.

“I really do not feel equal to such a pleasure, this morning,” she answered, sweetly. “I prefer to leave the selection entirely to Mrs. Morley. And you will admit, dear Eugene, that it will be in better taste to do so.”

In vain they both urged her; she was gently obstinate and did not yield.

By this means she secured a couple of hours to herself, which she improved by writing to the Señor a dainty note asking him if she might thank him personally for the superb gift she had received—she would be at home that morning to him—and him alone.

He came, eagerly. She was wearing his pink roses, and looked beautiful as an angel, but very sad; there were tears in her blue, blue eyes, as she lifted them falteringly to his face.

“Oh, señor,” she whispered, “I know now, to a certainty, that he does not love me—that he is only fulfilling his promise from a sense of duty. What shall I—what can I do?”

“Let him go. Marry the one who loves you most devotedly—who is distract of heart-trouble almost to madness, to lose you. Ah! if it were at the very steps of the holy altar, there is one who would snatch you from him, if he might! He is stupid—knows not a pearl when it is offered him; he is ungrateful! Let him go—and take him who flings himself at your feet—behold!” and the West Indian went down on one knee, dramatically, seizing her white hand.

Irene looked down at him, critically—he was evidently in earnest.

“I would do much—to be revenged,” she murmured.

“You would marry me?” he urged, kissing her hand.

“It might make me very unhappy—but I am almost tempted—to punish them,” she answered, slowly, but without hesitancy.

“Ah! charming angel! Yes, they must be punished. It is a burning wrong not to adore you, Miss St. Mark. What man could help it? You will break with him?—you will marry me!

You shall not be unhappy!—I will be too much devote. You shall have everything you like—everything!”

“The intended wedding is so well known, Señor.”

“Pah! that is a trifle! Let us scorn it! It will be what you call a good joke—excellent!”

“If I were sure you would always be fond of me—and good to me—”

“Fond of you, my angel!”—he had risen to his feet, and had his arms about her, his black eyes glowing with triumph.

“There must be no scene—no fuss—no duel, you know, Señor. We must be very discreet—no one must suspect—we must arrange—”

“I understand. It shall be best so—as you wish. Ah, leave that all to me, my adorable! I can arrange,” he answered her, with a wonderful smile, full of subtle promises of discretion. “Ha! ha! Yes, he shall be punish for not sufficiently adore such a pearl—such a lily! I shall not be sorry for him; it will be excellent—he deserves it. We will surprise him—make him greatly sorry; ha, ha!”

“What shall we do, Señor? There must be no scene, as I said.”

“It is very simple; we will go out, some time, to the priest and be married. We will be married, and then go away, very quiet. They may make a scene when they discover we are gone—what matter?—we will be far away, laughing in our sleeves—ah, what rapture!” and again the tropical enthusiast half-devoured the lily hand she allowed to remain in his own.

“They are coming,” cried Irene, hastily assuming a seat. “We can talk no more, now, Señor. I will think over what you have said, and give you a positive answer to-morrow.”

“To-morrow!—a year!”

“Well,” with a fascinating smile, “to-night, then, Señor.”

“I shall be devour—mad—with jealousy all day,” he had just time to say in a burning whisper, when the door opened, and the shoppers came in.

The Señor bowed himself out in a mood about equally rapturous and miserable. The suspense of that day was difficult for one of his ardent temperament to endure. He walked the halls, he paced the streets, he smoked many cigars, he looked at his watch, incessantly.

“If she coquette with me,” he said to himself, fiercely, more than once, “if she play with me, to amuse herself, I will kill her.”

Irene St. Mark hardly realized the terrible earnestness of this new lover, as she deliberated with herself, coolly, and at her leisure—“Will I, or will I not? How shall I decide?”

CHAPTER XXIX.

ALONE, WITH HER DESPAIR.

First love will with the heart remain
When its hopes have all gone by.—CLARE.

And I shall be alone until I die.—TENNYSON.

“It is his wedding-day.”

Oriole Darien had tossed on her feverish pillow nearly all night; toward morning, with the cheerful chancleers calling to each other through the frosty darkness, she had at last fallen into uneasy slumbers. Out of this she suddenly aroused and lay very quiet, looking at the large silvery morning star which shone into her window through the rosy flush of the advancing sunlight.

“It is his wedding-day.”

She sprang out on the floor as she remembered it, crept to the casement and stood there, in her white night-dress, with the growing light on her pale sad face.

“My heart is broken—my heart is broken,” she murmured, piteously. “I cannot bear it—I cannot! I did not think it would be so hard to bear! Oh, God help me!”

She sunk on her knees, with her eyes lifted to the dark-blue heaven, and her hands clasped and raised.

“Oh Christ, help me to bear it! I feel that my heart is breaking. Help me to suffer, and bless him and make him happy, whatever becomes of me.”

It was a long hour before she arose, shivering unconsciously with cold, and slowly and painfully dressed herself, moaning often:

“How shall I ever endure the long, long, lonesome, dreadful day?”

Cold as she was the house seemed to stifle her. Winding a scarf about her head and shoulders she stole down-stairs in the dim morning and went out into the leafless, deserted garden. The fountain was frozen; the flowers had vanished from their blackened stalks: the crisp

earth creaked under her light feet; the glistening frost lay over all. Past the statue of Psyche, into the summer-house she went; but she dared not linger there—it was too maddeningly full of haunting memories. So on and on she fled, through the fields and woods for hours. It seemed to her that she had been roving about a whole endless day when she found herself back in the mansion; yet it was hardly half-past eight, and Dapple was just coming from tapping at her chamber door to tell her breakfast was ready.

She went into the dining-room and took a cup of coffee, for she was faint and thirsty; a burning fever ran in her throbbing veins.

After that she found herself in the library, sitting before the fire, gazing at the face of the black marble clock on the mantle.

“It is his wedding-day. Half-past nine—at twelve she will be his wife. How swiftly the minutes fly! How intolerably long they are! How terrible it is to be all alone on such a day, yet I would fly from the sight of a human countenance.”

“Ten o’clock! It will soon be twelve. She will be his wife then!”

“Half-past ten! Will this day never come to an end? I must find something to do. I will go up-stairs and get my embroidery.”

“Eleven o’clock! What is the use of trying to work? My eyes burn; I cannot see to set a stitch; my fingers tremble, the silk is all in a tangle, I am blind with tears. What am I crying for? I know this is his wedding-day; but I ought to have been better prepared. In an hour she will be his wife. His wife! And she hardly cares for him! She does not half see or feel that she is the one happiest woman in the world. Why did I go and coax her to marry him? What a fool I was! I wanted her to spare his feelings. Who is there to spare mine? Oh, how my head aches, and my heart! How ill I feel! What shall I do with myself? I shall go wild if I sit here staring at that clock!”

She flung down the brilliant tangle of silks, the velvet she was embroidering, and arose, wandering restlessly from one magnificent room to another. Poor child! all alone with her trouble! The little brown hands were clenched and burning; the sweet dark eyes were dim with unspeakable grief; the beautiful blooming face was no longer a child’s vivid face, lovely only with innocence and charming coloring—it was pale with a woman’s passion and sorrow—pale; but perfect as ever in its sweet, strange glory.

“His wedding-day!—and I love him so,” she moaned to herself, over and over, as she wandered about the darkened drawing-room.

Suddenly an exquisite clock somewhere in the room began a soft, silvery chime—stroke after stroke, until twelve were told.

She stood still to listen. When the delicate echoes died away, she gave a little strangling cry, clutched at her bosom, and sunk down on the thick rug. She lay there a long time, unconscious. Mrs. Rice was about her duties; there was no one to look after the poor, suffering child. Nature gradually reasserted her forces; youth and health struggled with killing grief; her pulse strengthened, the long dark lashes were wearily lifted; the sad eyes looked about in listless wonder; presently Oriole sat up and remembered where she was and what had happened.

“She is his wife now,” she whispered to herself. “I must be brave. Oh, how wicked I am to feel as I do! But, my heart is broken. I wonder if he thinks of me—if he pities me! Of course he does not. This is his wedding-day; he is happy—and proud of her! She is so very fair and lovely and ladylike; while I am a poor dark little creature of whom he would always have been ashamed. Ah! if I could be proud, and not care, instead of loving him so!”

She raised herself wearily and the old restless roving began again. Up and down-stairs, in every room, the sad, white face showing a moment at every window, she wandered; out of doors, along the chilly piazzas; then in again, unquiet as the wind that began to rise and moan about the mansion.

“I can’t a-bear to see her a-going about like a ghost,” remarked Dapple, confidentially, to Mrs. Rice, as he ate cold beef and drank beer in the kitchen. “It’s dre’ful lonesome for her, poor pretty! I wish she had somebody with her as was a friend. There’s a sort of desprit look in her face, like she was thinking of something rash.”

“Not soolicide?” ejaculated the housekeeper.

He nodded his head.

“That is it,” he said; “but I’ll keep an eye on her.”

And so he did—from a distance—quite unsuspected by the wretched child.

"I must not think about him—it is wicked! This is his wedding-day; she is his wife now; I have only to remember that."

So said Oriole to herself over and over again that interminable afternoon.

What an afternoon it was! The sunrising had been clear, but, as the morning advanced, thick clouds had drifted up from the horizon; a wild, wintry wind had begun to blow. At four o'clock it was quite dark. Snow was falling fast, and being whirled into drifts. Shutters rattled; the branches of trees creaked against the house; Oriole grew more feverish and more restless.

"They will not mind the storm," she whispered to herself. "They have started on their wedding journey. They are traveling South as fast as steam will carry them. It will be warm and sunny down in Florida; they will be very happy there! This fierce wind makes me shiver to hear it. They will be where it is summer; it is winter here," and she shuddered. "Oh, father, father, I wish you were here to take me in your lap and rock me while I laid my tired, aching head on your shoulder! It is wicked of me to be so wretched. I know that. Indeed, I am trying all I can not to mind it. Who is that? Oh, is it you, Dapple? Yes, please, make the fire burn as bright as possible; it will seem less lonely. No, I do not care for dinner. I never could eat all alone, and I am not hungry to-day. Yes, Mrs. Rice may bring me a cup of tea and a slice of toast by and by, but not just yet."

Dapple retired from the room and remained close by the door in the hall, for he felt anxious about the pale-faced girl.

"I don't fancy the look of her; it is desprits," he repeated to himself.

In a few minutes he made another excuse to go in and light the lamps. It was hardly five o'clock, but dark outside as deepest night. The wind was still rising, the snow coming down more thickly. He found Miss Darien standing before the cheerful fire he had lately replenished, and which lighted the somber old library so bravely, warming the crimson velvet hangings and playing over the gilded backs of the books, that she hardly noticed he had added to the light. He saw that her eyes were tired and heavy, her young face very white.

"I will bring her the tea directly an' hadvise her to drink it," he said to himself, as he slipped out of the room unnoticed. But, as he reached the hall, he was surprised to hear the door-bell ring.

"Who can it be coming 'ere in such a storm? They wasn't to return before to-morrow afternoon. Mebbe it's Darien himself, come to visit his daughter? I'll soon see," and he unfastened the double door which he had bolted for the night.

Oriole did not hear the bell, or the sound of voices in the hall; she remained by the fire, her slim figure, in its dark silk dress, distinctly outlined against the golden blaze. The red and gold of nasturtium blossoms would scarcely have accorded with her rich young beauty now, as they did that first day on which Eugene Morley had gazed on her in admiring surprise. Her vivid bloom had changed to a colorless pallor; her attitude was listless; the long black lashes almost touched her cheeks, as she gazed, with heavy eyes, into the fire.

"His wedding-day—and I loved him so!" she murmured once more.

And then an arm slipped about her soft waist; a tender kiss fell on her forehead; she was drawn close, close to some one's warm breast.

"Have you come back to your poor birdie, father? Oh, father, my heart is broken; let me die," she cried, with a sob.

"Oriole, my love, my bird, my darling, look up! It is not your father!"

Who was this, speaking to her? That voice!—was she in a dream, or was she going wild? Swiftly the weary lids flew open; she raised her suddenly-shining eyes and looked in the face of him who held her.

"Eugene!"

"Yes, my love, my little darling! Eugene, come to tell you how he loves you—how nothing shall ever again part him from his little love!"

"But—this is your wedding-day! Where is—your wife?"

"I have no wife," he cried, with a joyous laugh. "Thank Heaven, she cheated me—at the very church door, as one might say! My darling! my darling! Of whom but you did I think the moment they told me she had fled with her Southern admirer, whose millions had

proved more irresistible than my claims upon her? She was false, dishonest, avaricious, and she threw me overboard for a richer man. They dreaded to tell me the evil news! They pitied me! Oh, my bright bird, I could laugh to think of their pity! Why, darling, my heart bounded at the thought of freedom! Nothing could restrain me from flying to you! They do not know what has become of me; perhaps they think I am roving about in the storm, distracted; but, I am here, with you, my sweet one! Tell me, are you as happy as I am? Oriole, I did not know how I loved you, until her act freed me and I was at liberty to think of you! My darling, speak!—are you as happy as I am?"

His dazzling eyes insisted on their answer. The wind howled around the mansion, shrieking derisively down the chimney; the snow whirled down and sputtered on the golden fire; but, what did these lovers know of the storm? The girl's glorious eyes drank in the passion and adoration poured into them from her lover's.

"And she is not your wife, Eugene?"

"No one will ever be my wife, now, sweet one, until you consent to wear that name. Oriole, you will be my wife, some day, not so very far away? I am a poor man; I cannot offer you any bribe but my love."

She laughed at the idea of a bribe.

"You know how I love you; I never could conceal it," she said, simply. "With me, my love is my very life."

Dapple waited—with extraordinary discretion—more than an hour before tapping at the library door. They did not hear him and he knocked more loudly.

"I thought as how Miss Darien would be needing her tea, Mr. Morley; and you yourself, sir, 'aving 'ad no supper; so Mrs. Rice an' me has got up a bit of a tea-dinner, if you'd please to come out and have some, Miss Darien, and you, sir."

"You are very kind," said Oriole; "I'm not hungry, Dapple; but perhaps Mr. Morley is. I will bring him out."

There was a neat little hot supper on the table for two. The lovers never could recall of what it consisted, or tell why it was so strangely delicious; but they lingered over it a long time, while the butler, deftly attending upon them, said to himself he had never believed a gentleman could be so 'andsome or a lady so lovely as this pair were that evening.

"Young master is no longer the heir," he thought, "an' she is only Darien's daughter; but I'd rather wait on them than any other couple in the wide world! I must just get Mrs. Rice to peep through the pantry door an' see how 'appy they look," but on going to call her he found Mrs. Rice had been looking for herself, some time, and quite agreed with him that no beautiful couple could be found.

"But, I'm dying of curiosity to know what brought him 'ere to-night, Dapple."

"Love it was," spoke the butler, wisely; he had listened at the library door after his master's arrival. "Love it was! 'Tother one jilted him at the very altar, an' he come straight 'ere to the one he liked best."

CHAPTER XXX.

WHAT THE JUNE ROSES BROUGHT.

Oh, the little birds sung east and the little birds sung west.
—MRS. BROWNING.

She is coming, my own, my sweet!—TENNYSON.

It was not without a struggle that Irene had given up youth, beauty, and delight, for the magnificent triumph of being the bride of the dark little West Indian, and the sharer of his millions. The more she was tempted to leave Eugene, the more charming he seemed to her; but the passion for money and display, which was her leading motive, got the better of her romantic dreams, and—the very night before the wedding which was to have been—she went out with the Señor, and returned to the hotel, his wife.

Her maid was the only one admitted to her confidence. This girl had secretly packed Irene's valuables; and the trunks filled with her bridal finery were to be sent on to Washington after them; at nine o'clock that evening, the wedded pair took the train for that city, leaving the maid to break the news to Mrs. St. Mark.

Whether the Señora is happy with her fiery, but alien husband, or not, no one can say; she lives a life of extravagant splendor, a great portion of her time being spent in Paris, where her dresses and jewels rival those of the bonanza queens.

As Eugene told Oriole, he was immensely

pitied and consoled with when the news of her flight came out; for five minutes he did feel grieved and indignant; but, when he fled from his sympathetic friends, and was heard no more from for that day, it was not to the river he had rushed to drown his sorrows, but to the train which would take him to her he had tried in vain to ignore.

His friends were alarmed about him, until Felix, who was the first to guess the truth, declared his belief that Eugene had gone to Morley Beeches.

"So, mother," said Felix, with a long sigh, "you see how foolish it was of me to have had any hope. Those two were made for each other; having met, it was inevitable that they should love. It will take me a long time to forget her; yet, I am glad she is to be happy. Poor Eugene! he is the rich one, after all! He has won a pearl that will make him the envied of men. I suppose I must be content with the Gathorne fortune—and with you, my sweet mother," bending to kiss her hand, that she might not see the dew which suddenly clouded his melancholy dark eyes.

"I am grieved for your grief, my son," she answered him, very tenderly. "I know, however, that it is not life-long. Oriole has bewitched you with her strange, bright beauty, and with the fascination of her innocence and artlessness; but there is a pure and noble wife, somewhere in this broad land of ours, waiting for my Felix to claim her, and bring her to our beautiful home at Morley Beeches,"—and she smiled hopefully, even joyfully. "And now, if you believe we shall find Eugene at the Beeches, we had better follow him thither."

Which they did.

Eugene had walked—in the face of the howling storm—the three miles from the station; these two, arriving by a later train, were so fortunate as to secure the only conveyance the place afforded; and, while the lovers yet lingered over their supper—looking across the table into each other's eyes, in such a fashion that they forgot the more serious duty of eating—mother and son arrived, and Mrs. Rice had to brew more coffee, and set forth more cold turkey and hot oysters; while Oriole, flying into Mrs. Morley's arms, and hiding her glowing face in that kind bosom, begged to be forgiven for not being able to help loving Eugene, and being so happy.

The following day Zophiel Darien appeared on the scene.

It was with "fear and trembling" young Morley approached him on the subject of his daughter—

"You shot me once for just touching her hand to say good-by; dare I ask you, now that I am free, to give her to me entirely?"

"She is a willful, obstinate piece—just like her father," answered Darien, something like a smile glimmering in his deep-set eyes. "If she is determined on having you, Mr. Morley, there is no use of my setting up an opposition."

"You know I am poor," added Eugene, humbly.

"I don't think Madame Morley will allow you to suffer," was the dry reply. "And now, let me say to you, my daughter must finish her school-year. After that it will be time to talk of other plans."

"Go away from Morley Beeches!—back to that stupid school!"

"Certainly! My little girl is only seventeen. If you care for her you will not forget her before next June."

And so, Oriole returned to her school; for Zophiel Darien was as wise as he was determined; and then, Eugene offered to be Mrs. Morley's steward, and really became industrious, by spasms; though Felix had to go over his work after him.

Poor Eugene! It was a lonesome winter! But it passed in spite of its dullness, while his spring days were brightened by the surreptitious discovery that his dear step-mother was quietly preparing any number of exquisite dresses, and other articles of feminine apparel, which looked to him like a wedding trousseau.

And then—June came and brought the roses—and Oriole! Oh, sweetest month of all the year! If sweet even to us experienced ones—sweeter than words can describe, with its fresh green leaferies, and breath of honeysuckle and wild grape, clover and a world of red, red roses—how sweet must it have been to those young lovers, idling away in each other's company, the flying days which brought them to their wedding-day.

Stop here, poor, prosy pen!—do not attempt to paint the magic of the June weather, the young loveliness of the bride, the glorious hap-

pininess of him who had won her! Silence is most eloquent in such presence!

Eugene really believed he should be perfectly content, all his days, to live in the ivy-clad Lodge with Oriole. His friends had other views for him, however. Among Oriole's wedding-presents were a few of the Gathorne jewels and all her *trousseau* from Mrs. Morley; and, from her father—one hundred thousand dollars in bonds and money!

"You find your bride is not portionless, after all," said Zophiel Darien to Eugene, with an air of indescribable pride.

"I did not dream of this," murmured the proud young aristocrat.

"I dare say not. When I left here I had saved a few thousand dollars. I was resolved that my child should be the equal, in fortune, of the young ladies who scorned her. Perhaps I hoped to *purchase* happiness for her, since gold appeared to be the talisman to secure it! I speculated, very cautiously; it must be that love for Oriole inspired me with extraordinary prudence, for, where others lost, I won. Ignorant of Wall street, I became quite famous there, for lucky ventures. In six months my ten thousand had broadened into more than ten times that sum. And now, Mr. Morley, it is an intense pleasure to me to dower my daughter, knowing that she is loved for herself alone."

They are all quite happy at Morley Beeches. Mrs. Morley is devoted to her son, who remains a book-worm and dreamer;—not discontented—on the contrary quietly content—while his gentle mother looks out for him, among the young ladies of their acquaintance, a suitable wife.

THE END.

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